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Biography.

EMINENT

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OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

VOL. III.

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LONGMAN, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMANS,

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1838.

LIVES

of the

MOST EMINENT LITERARY

AND

SCIENTIFIC MEN

OF

GREAT BRITAIN

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CONTENTS.

LIVES

OF

EMINENT

LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC MEN.

JAMES SHIRLEY.

(1596—1666.)

It is to be lamented that we do not possess the means of furnishing much more than a meagre sketch of the life of this distinguished dramatist. We have abundant materials for the history of the drama during the period in which he flourished; but only a few scanty facts have been preserved concerning his personal fortunes. For most of these facts we are chiefly indebted to the industrious researches of his last biographer, who, if he added but little to that which was previously known, may be presumed to have gleaned all the particulars that are now likely to be recovered.*

James Shirley is conjectured to have descended from an ancient family; but whether the seat of his ancestors

* The Rev. Alex. Dyce. See life prefixed to Gifford's edition of the works of Shirley. The principal sources upon which we have drawn in this memoir are, Gifford, Langbaine, Dibdin (History of the Stage), Chalmers, Biographia Dramatica, Biographia Britannica, Dodsley's Old Plays (last edition), New Theatrical Dictionary (1792), Bayle's Dictionary, Wood's Ath. Oxon, &c.

was Sussex or Warwickshire, cannot be determined. His coat of arms, which may be seen in a picture of the poet, painted by some unknown artist, in the Bodleian library at Oxford, equally favours both suppositions. By an entry in Merchant Tailors' school, it appears that he was born either on the 13th or 18th of September 1596, and not 1594, as it is asserted in some of the works of reference. The place of his birth has not been accurately ascertained; but it was either in the parish or the neighbourhood of St. Mary Woolchurch, London. Wood states, upon the authority of Shirley's son, "the butler of Furnival's Inn in Holborn, near London," that the poet was born "where the stock-market now is:" but this information, precise as it is, avails us nothing at this distance of time, seeing that the locality of the stock-market itself is a matter of conjecture. At twelve years of age, he was admitted into Merchant Tailors' school: the date of the entry in the register-book is the 4th of October 1608. In the absence of any account of his boyhood, we may infer, that up to this time he lived in London; and, to judge by the rapidity of his subsequent progress, considerable pains appear to have been taken in the formation of his mind, and the direction of his incipient studies. His abilities were early manifested in the facility with which he passed through his probationary career. On the 11th of March 1612, he attained to the honourable place of "eighth boy, or last monitor;" and as it is said that he was removed to St. John's college, Oxford, in the same year, we are to conclude that he left the school on the 11th of June, that being the annual election-day, when the boys who have reached the upper class always depart. But we must observe, that it appears to us extremely doubtful whether Shirley was ever entered at Oxford. The original statement of that fact rests upon the sole authority of Wood, who says that Dr. William Laud presided at St. John's at that time; that he had a very great affection for Shirley, especially for the pregnant parts

that were visible in him*; but that having a broad or large mole on his cheek, which some people considered a deformity, the worthy doctor "would often tell him that he was an unfit person to take the sacred function upon him, and should never have his consent so to do." This story of the mole was enlarged still more circumstantially by a subsequent writer*, who sets forth that "Shirley had unfortunately a large mole upon his left cheek, which much disfigured him, and gave him a very forbidding appearance. Laud observed very justly [it is difficult not to admire the writer's estimate of Laud's judgment in this matter], that an audience can scarce help conceiving a prejudice against a man whose appearance shocks them; and were he to preach with the tongue of an angel, that prejudice could never be surmounted; to which more is added, of the same kind, such as the strange influences which the sight of a mole in the pulpit would be likely to have on the imagination of women," &c. Now, it is rather remarkable, and we are surprised that it escaped the notice of the biographers of Shirley, that the only likeness that remains of the poet, and which presents the left side of his face in full, exhibits no trace whatever of a blemish, which is described to have been so striking. Whether the painter omitted it in a spirit of flattery, or whether Shirley had recourse to an operation to relieve himself from a mark which Dr. Laud apprehended would mar his prospects in life, cannot, of course, be ascertained; but it is rather curious that the artist should have chosen to take the portrait exactly in that position which must have exposed the mole, if the mole ever existed. So trifling a point, however, would scarcely be worth contending for either way, if our suspicion of its correctness as an evidence of Shirley's residence at Oxford were not confirmed by ascertained facts, that would appear to negative the whole statement. In the public records of the college, Shirley's name is nowhere to be found; and Dr. Bliss, who undertook, at the

* Sheil; Cibber's Lives of the Poets.

request of the Rev. Alexander Dyce, to examine the entries, declares, that after a long and unsatisfactory search, he could not discover any entry whatever of James Shirley, although he looked over every book that could throw any light on such an admission, and had access also to a list of the members of St. John's college, actually in the handwriting of Dr. Laud, in which no such name occurred. We are, therefore, disposed to believe that Shirley never was entered at Oxford, and the more so, because there is good reason to know that he was entered at Catherine hall, Cambridge, where he took out a degree as bachelor of arts, and afterwards graduated as master of arts. The registers of Cambridge do not contain any information concerning him; but there is a memorandum extant, in the handwriting of Dr. Farmer, to this effect:—"James Shirley, B. A., Cath. Hall, 1619 *," which, as well as the title-page of Shirley's first production †, sets the question at rest. The fact is further confirmed by the following epitaph, which was written on the fly-leaf of a work entitled, *Lacrymæ Cantabrigenses: In obitum Serenissimæ Reginæ Annæ, Conjugis dilectissimæ Jacobi Magnæ Brittanniæ et Hiberniæ Regis*, 1619, 4to. ‡, in the possession of Mr. David Laing of Edinburgh.

On the death of QUEEN ANNE, QUEEN *of* JAMES *the First.*

> "Oh! let me weep, and, though I censured be,
> I'll add one drop of water to this sea;
> Yet why should this be vain, since that before
> Heaven being full, one star is added more?"
>
> *Fleus post posuit Jac. Shirley, Aul. Cather. in Art. Bac.*

To which may be added the following testimony of Thomas Bancroft, the author of *Two Bookes of Epi-*

* This memorandum was written in a copy of Shirley's poems, now in the possession of the Rev. Alexander Dyce, who, however, had no means of tracing Dr. Farmer's authority.

† Eccles, or the Infortunate Lovers, a poem, by James Shirley, Cant. in Art., Bacc. Lond. 1618, 8vo.

‡ Extracted by Mr. Dyce. Shirley's works, vi. 514.

grammes, &c., 1639, 4to.; in one of which he celebrates his collegiate friendship for Shirley, from which he contrives to extract the subjoined elaborate pun:

"*To* James Shirley.

"James, thou and I did spend some precious yeeres
At Katherine-Hall; since when, we sometimes feele
In our poetick braines (as plaine appeares)
A whirling trick, then caught from Katherine's wheele."

It is evident, therefore, that while several circumstances concur to prove that Shirley was at Cambridge, we have no ground for the statement that he was at Oxford, except the vague assertion of Wood.

Notwithstanding the fears of Laud, and his resolute opposition to Shirley's intention of entering the church, supposing the anecdote of the doctor's scruples about the mole to be really authentic, the future dramatist had no sooner finished his collegiate course than he took holy orders, and obtained a preferment at or near St. Alban's in Hertfordshire. He was not long in the enjoyment of this living, when, yielding to some conscientious doubts that arose to him in the discharge of his clerical duties, he surrendered his benefice, and embraced the Roman catholic religion. It was the age of theological disputation; and, although there is no need to vindicate the poet from the charge of unworthy motives, for which charge, indeed, no apparent pretext could be assigned, since instead of gaining any thing by his conversion, he forfeited all the worldly advantages he possessed, this act may be said to exhibit the germ of that independence of mind which, as far as we can judge of his character by incidental revelations in his works, was stamped upon his conduct throughout life. Numerous passages scattered throughout his dramas testify to the fidelity with which he maintained a faith which he appears to have conscientiously embraced.

Upon abandoning the clerical profession, he procured

the appointment* of master of the grammar-school at St. Albans, which he held during the years 1623 and 1624†; when, becoming weariful of the drudgery of an office which is always repugnant to men of a poetical temperament, he threw up his situation, and fixed himself at Gray's Inn, where he commenced the precarious profession of writing for the stage. There is reason, however, to believe that he made his first dramatic essay before he resolved upon this step; and it is not improbable that the success which attended it may have determined him to enter upon a course which was likely to be more profitable to him than a teachership in an endowed school, and which was certainly more agreeable to his tastes. His earliest dramatic production, a comedy, entitled *Love Tricks, or the School of Complement*, was licensed by sir Henry Herbert, on the 10th of February, 1624—5; and, as Westerman, his successor in the school, was not appointed until 1625, it is evident that the play was written while he was yet engaged in his scholastic labours. That he did not at that time intend to dedicate himself to the service of the stage, is explicitly declared in the prologue, in which, deprecating the severity of his audience, he informs them that the play is his first production:—

> "The first fruits of a muse, that before this
> Never saluted audience, nor doth mean
> To swear himself a factor for the scene."

It does not appear that this comedy had more than a moderate share of public favour, either during the lifetime of the author, or after his death. It was not printed until the year 1631, when the first title was dropped; nor was it reprinted for six years afterwards. A third edition appeared after his death, in 1667, when it was acted by the duke of York's servants, at the theatre in

* It is stated in Dr. Aikin's General Biography, vol. ix., that Shirley "opened a grammar school at St. Alban's." This is an oversight. The grammar school was founded by charter, by Edward VI.

† Clutterbuck's History of Hertfordshire.

little Lincoln's Inn Fields; and introduced by a prologue, in which the writer considered it necessary to enter into a sort of defence of the "poor author Shirley," bespeaking a merciful consideration of the piece, on the ground of the poverty of more recent productions. Appealing to the modern poets, the prologue goes on to say —

> "The fault's yours; for our stage shall be no debtor
> To Shirley's play, if you would write a better."

Old Evelyn, who witnessed its representation at this time, describes it to be a "silly play," no part of which seems to have made any impression on him, except the dancing of a Miss Davies in shepherd's clothes. But, notwithstanding these indications of the slight applause with which the piece was received, it contains a few passages of considerable ingenuity, and lashes some of the follies of the age with a lively and pertinent wit. In the construction of the fable there are palpable traces of inexperience; the plot is rather confused; the scenes are too much elaborated and involved; and all throughout the play the interest is made to depend less upon the force of individual character, and the originality of the incidents, than upon the old stage devices of transparent disguises and their attendant equivoque, which were ready made to the hand of the author, and cost him no further trouble than mere appropriation. But the dialogue is vigorous and elastic; and the satires upon contemporary follies, especially the ridiculous laws of gallantry and politeness then in vogue, although not very intelligible now, are irresistibly humorous.

The state of the stage when Shirley appeared as a dramatist, was in the highest degree favourable to his genius. Between the years 1550 and 1629, no less than seventeen theatres had gradually risen into greater or lesser importance in London, most of them provided with regular companies, who performed at different periods of the year, changing their quarters according to circumstances, and, probably, as in later times, forming new combinations of strength by occasional

drafts upon each other. Some of these houses were, of course, subordinate, according to their locality and the reputation of the actors. Authors multiplied in proportion to the increase of the theatres, or rather, they acted mutually in the encouragement and maintenance of their common interest. During the reign of James I., between 1603 and 1625, there were upwards of 200 plays produced, without taking into account the masques, which were a favourite source of popular and fashionable entertainment. Previously, however, to the reign of king James, the dramatic art, although it was protected by Elizabeth, did not attain any great degree of national consequence; but was supported rather by the taste of influential individuals than by the public patronage. The only instance in which queen Elizabeth took any direct measure to give permanency to theatrical representations, was at the request of sir Francis Walsingham, when she conferred salaries upon twelve of the most distinguished players, and allowed them to take the title of her majesty's comedians and servants. In addition to these legitimately constituted actors, were the children of the chapel, and of the revels, and the retainers of noblemen, who, by virtue of their lords' sanction, were permitted to play in the city and elsewhere, as well as in the houses of their masters. In this way the lord admiral, and the lord Strange, had players in their household; but upon any complaints against them for using improper or dangerous expressions in their performances, it was usual to prohibit, and sometimes even to punish them; so that the countenance they enjoyed was capricious and conditional, after all. Stow, in his Survey of London, referring to a period immediately preceding and including the early years of the reign of Elizabeth, states that theatrical recreations, which in former days were devised by ingenious tradesmen and gentlemen's servants, to expose vice and exhibit the heroic actions of our ancestors, had degenerated into a trade; and that, instead of being represented at festivals, in private houses, and at weddings, they came to be

played in great inns, where there were secret chambers and galleries, on Sundays and holidays, until the churches were deserted. The evil of these doings, according to the venerable chronicler, was not confined to the utterance of seditious speeches, but even extended to the corruption of the morals of the people. The children of the worthy citizens were inveigled, on such occasions, to "private and unmeet contracts," and exposed to the influence of unchaste dialogues, and "other enormities." In consequence of these proceedings, the worshipful corporation of London passed an act in council, in the year 1574, by which it was ordained that no play should be openly acted, within the liberties of the city, wherein should be uttered any words, examples, or doings, of an unchaste or seditious nature, under a penalty of five pounds, and fourteen days' imprisonment; and that no play should be acted until it was first perused and allowed by the lord mayor and the court of aldermen. The drama was then in its infancy, and, like all other processes of human civilisation, was exposed to be dealt with by the prejudices of the ignorant; but as it is impossible to restrain the progress of the human mind by absurd regulations, in which the real character and tendency of intellectual productions are wholly overlooked, it is not very surprising that the players, instead of submitting to the restrictions of this burlesque court of criticism, only ran into farther excesses, and provoked still heavier punishments. The consternation in the city now took something of the shape of a panic: it was loudly affirmed that a strange kind of infection had set in, that religion and the state were in danger, that honesty and manners were undermined in the populace, and the players were regarded by the credulous and timid magistracy as the agents of a new social revolution. The reader's imagination will readily fill up this picture of a sudden, brief, and fiery persecution of the stage; the hourly fears of the good burgesses, lest their household should be contaminated; the jealous care with which they watched the out-goings and in-comings of

their wives and daughters; and all those minute features of a season of trepidation which our early dramatists, profiting by the occasion, have so happily seized upon, and ridiculed in their comedies. The result was, that, for a short time, the players were entirely suppressed: but it was only to rise again, like Antæus, with renewed vigour. Upon application to the queen in council, they were allowed to renew their performances, under certain restrictions, which, although some of them were sufficiently ridiculous, had the ultimate effect of giving greater consistency, union, and power to the stage than ever it enjoyed before. By this act of toleration, none but the queen's players were permitted to act, and their number and names were, for better security, transmitted by the lord treasurer to the lord mayor, and the justices of Middlesex and Surrey. They were compelled also to perform in concert, and not suffered to divide themselves into separate companies. They were prohibited from acting on Sundays or festival days until after evening prayers; and it was further required of them, that there should be no performances whatever in the dark, but that all their representations should close before sunset. Against such parts of these regulations as were inconsiderately oppressive, and founded in ignorance of the higher uses and moral utility of the drama, the players continued to exhibit symptoms of disaffection, and were as often restrained and mulcted; and in this unsettled state the theatre remained until the first regular licence was granted under the privy seal, to Shakspeare and his friends, in the opening year of the reign of James I. By this licence, the players included within its sanction were permitted to exhibit plays, not merely at their usual theatre, the Globe on the Bankside, but in any other theatre they thought proper: so there is fair warrant for the inference that, especially as they were not encumbered with scenery, they transported themselves at different periods from one house to another, as circumstances happened to invite them. The company acting under this licence, in which the

well-known names of Burbage, Shakspeare, Condell, Hemmings, and Fletcher appear, occupied the Globe and the Blackfriars, as well as a winter and a summer house, in which they assumed the title of the king's servants. In addition to these four theatres, there were also open the Phœnix, in Drury-lane, where the queen's servants performed; and the private theatre in Salisbury-court, held by a company called the prince's servants; but there is no record extant of the actors who furnished the entertainments in these houses, nor do we possess any means of satisfactorily ascertaining the class of performances they exhibited, except an occasional reference to the theatres in the early editions of some of the old plays. The only remaining houses of any note at this period, were the Red Bull in St. John's-street, and the Fortune, near Whitecross-street, the former of which appears to have been appropriated to the reception of the more respectable citizens, and the latter to persons of an inferior order; but even this is a matter of conjecture.

The company to which Shakspeare belonged was, in every point of view, the most distinguished; but as by their licence they were enabled to change their ground at their own discretion, the fact, that some of the best plays were brought out at different houses, cannot be accepted as a proof that all the houses were regularly dedicated to the production of the best plays. It may be presumed that it was only during the visits of the licensed company that the higher order of dramas were acted in the minor houses, and that at other times a species of entertainment better adapted to the tastes of the inferior classes formed the staple of the performances. Nearly all the plays that obtained great estimation were brought out at the Globe, the Blackfriars, or the Phœnix; which, therefore, may be inferred to have been the principal theatres. Yet there is enough of evidence to show that regular plays were enacted at the Fortune, of which Alleyn, the founder of Dulwich hospital, and an actor of such repute that Ben Jonson celebrated his talents in an epigram, was the manager.

Heywood, speaking of Alleyn, compares him to Proteus for versatility, and to Roscius for eloquence: and he is said—but the authority is not conclusive, because the assertion is vague—to have been the original representative of some of the principal characters in Shakspeare's plays. What these characters were, has not been ascertained; while it is known that Burbage was the original Richard, and that Lewin was the first Hamlet, as well as other instances of a similar kind. But that he was an actor of considerable ability, and that he took an elevated range of parts, can hardly be doubted, from the terms of the epigram to which we have alluded.* If the plays in which Alleyn appeared had been of an indifferent and shallow description, he could hardly have elicited the panegyric of so rigid a critic as Ben Jonson.

* The following is the epigram :—

> If Rome so great, and in her wisest age,
> Feared not to boast the glories of her stage,
> A skilful Roscius, and great Æsop, men
> Yet crowned with honours, as with riches then,
> Who had no less a trumpet to their name
> Than Cicero, whose very breath was fame;
> How can so great example die in me,
> That, Alleyn, I should pause to publish thee?
> Who, both their graces, in thyself hast more
> Outstripped, than they did all that went before:
> And present worth, in all dost so contract,
> As others spake, but only thou dost act;
> Wear this renown; 't is just that who did give
> So many poets life, by one should live.

It is related of Alleyn, that upon the occasion of performing a demon in one of Shakspeare's plays, he was surprised in the midst of the scene by an apparition of the devil, which worked so deeply on his mind, that he made a vow of charity, which he afterwards fulfilled in the establishment of Dulwich hospital. The anecdote is utterly unworthy of credit, and is even more absurd than the ridiculous tradition, that upon the rebuilding of the Fortune theatre, which he took down and enlarged when he became manager of it, he discovered a treasure in the ruins of the old house, which enabled him to found and endow that excellent institution. The origin of these stories must be traced to the difficulty of accounting for the extraordinary wealth of an actor, at a time when, whatever might have been their immediate success, none of them could have realised by their profession the splendid fortune Alleyn must have possessed. If Alleyn's property did not even exceed the 800*l.* per annum with which he endowed the hospital at Dulwich, it was enough to set the curious speculating as to how it was amassed. But, perhaps, it is susceptible of a very simple solution after all. Alleyn married three times, and got a handsome settlement with each of his wives; he was keeper of the king's menagerie, and master of the royal bear-garden; he was eminently successful in his management of the Fortune theatre; and was withal so penurious in his living, that after having founded Dulwich hospital, he became the first pensioner on his own charity. Such a man might make money where others would fail.

Of the interior construction of the theatres about this period, Mr. Dyce gives us a very curious description, which shows, that while, in some points of view, the stage had made considerable advances in refinement, it retained, in other respects, traces of primitive rudeness that were altogether inconsistent with the dignity of the dramas of the age. It appears that nearly all the theatres were built of wood; those which were called private theatres were completely roofed, while the rest, the public establishments, were entirely exposed to the sky, except immediately over the stage and the galleries. The arrangements for the audience resembled, at least in the outlines of the accommodation, those of the present day; there were tiers of galleries, or scaffolds, and beneath them were the boxes or rooms for persons of the highest rank. In the private theatres these boxes were furnished with locks, and the keys were given to the individuals who rented or purchased them. The centre area, separated from the stage by pales, was called the pit in the private theatres, and was furnished with seats; while at the other houses it was more appropriately called the yard, because it was open to the weather, and had no seats whatever. The outside of every theatre was furnished with a sign, emblamatical of its name, such as the Globe, the Fortune, &c.* And during the time that the exhibition was going forward within, a flag was always hoisted on the roof. The interior of the audience part of the house was lighted by

* Heywood alludes to this custom, in the English Traveller (1633), where he speaks of a picture or statue of Fortune, before the entrance to the Fortune theatre.

> I'le rather stand heere
> Like a statue in the forefront of your house
> For ever; like the picture of dame Fortune
> Before the Fortune playhouse.

Mr. Stevens conjectures, from the extent of this house, which was a large round brick building, that all the actors resided within its precincts. It was thus described in an advertisement in the *Mercurius Politicus* in February, 1661. "The Fortune playhouse, situate between Whitecross-street and Golding-square, in the parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate, with the ground thereunto belonging, is to be let to be built upon; where twenty-three tenements may be erected, with gardens; and a street may be cut through for the better accommodation of the buildings."

cressets, or large lanterns, and the stage by two solemn branches; for it appears that the art of concealing the lights at the wings, and casting it up from the front of the proscenium, was then wholly unknown. It is supposed that the members of the orchestra, who are presumed to have been neither very numerous nor very scientific, and whose instruments consisted chiefly of trumpets, hautboys, cornets, lutes, recorders, viols, and organs, sat in an upper balcony, situated above that part of the house where the stage-box of the present times is placed.

The audiences, unlike those of modern days, instead of being impatient for the performances to begin, or exhibiting a preparatory mood of attention, brought their own amusements with them; so that they could entertain themselves, to their own satisfaction, until it pleased the players to leave off their jests behind the curtain and begin. People who arrived before the play commenced, resorted to cards, or tobacco, or reading, or drinking ale, and eating nuts and apples, to fill up the time. Young men of fashion, critics, and wits, even during the performance, used to station themselves on the stage, either lying on rushes (with which the boards were generally strewed, except on great occasions, when they were covered with matting), or seated on stools, smoking tobacco, to which they were helped by their pages, who were in attendance. This nuisance, by the way, continued down so lately as the time of Garrick, modified by degrees, until at length it was abolished altogether. The only instance in which we are aware of any similar practice being followed within the memory of the present generation, is at the Circus or Amphitheatre, dedicated to mixed equestrian and melodramatic representations, where, at a particular period of the evening, when the circus or centre area, previously crowded with people, is required for the feats of the horses, the surplus audience, who were obliged to take up their stations in that open space for want of room elsewhere, are rapidly drafted on to the stage, where

tables and forms are previously arranged for their reception.

The commencement of the entertainments was usually announced by a flourish of trumpets, and, at the third sounding, the curtain, which usually opened in the middle, and ran upon iron rods, was drawn, and discovered the stage. Other curtains, which were called *traverses*,* were employed in the course of the performances, as substitutes for scenes; but it is tolerably evident that in this essential department of theatrical illusion no great ingenuity was exhibited. The roof of the stage, says Mr. Dyce (to whose description we refer, on account of its fulness and accuracy), was generally painted blue, to resemble the heavens, which was the name by which it was designated, or adorned with drapery of that colour. Moveable scenery was never used; but to prevent any misconception, as well as to supply the place of scenes, a board was put up in some conspicuous place with the name of the supposed scene inscribed upon it in large letters. There was a balcony at the back, eight or nine feet high, which served any purposes of a chamber window or gallery, according to circumstances; a portion of the dialogue was occasionally spoken from it; and it was screened by a curtain, to conceal the speakers, whenever it happened to be necessary. A bed indicated a sleeping-room; a table, and pen and ink, a counting-house; and so on; the imagination of the spectator being required to fill up what the resources or skill of the actors were unable to supply. The rudest contrivances were resorted to for the purpose of representing towers, trees, &c.; and trap doors, although their use appears to have been limited, were put into requisition. The wardrobes, in the best theatres, were of a costly description; the male characters wore periwigs; the young men who played the female parts used vizards; and the speaker of the prologue was usually habited in a suit of black velvet. "During the play," continues Mr. Dyce, "the clown would break forth into extemporaneous buffoonery; there was dancing and

singing between the acts; and at the end of the piece, there was a song or *jig*, a farcical rhyming composition, of considerable length, said or sung by the clown, and accompanied with dancing and playing on the pipe and tabor. A prayer for the queen, offered by the actors on their knees, concluded the whole. The price of admission appears to have varied according to the rank and estimation of the theatre: a shilling was charged for a place in the best boxes; the entrance money to the pit and galleries was sixpence, twopence, and sometimes a penny; the performance commenced at three o'clock."

Such was the state of theatrical representations when Shirley produced his first piece. But it must be remembered, that although this sketch of the appointments of the stage presents to us an image of poverty and rudeness, it shows a remarkable improvement upon the barbarous exhibitions of the preceding age. The theatres were, in fact, advancing every year in progressive prosperity, and held out sufficient inducements in their increasing patronage to justify Shirley in abandoning his obscurity at St. Albans, and trusting confidently to the power of his genius for working out his own fortunes as a dramatist. He came to London in the last year of the reign of James; and as the prosperity of the stage brightened during the early part of the succeeding reign, before the Puritans succeeded in making head against the unfortunate Charles, we may conclude that his first steps in his new career were sufficiently prosperous to gratify and stimulate his ambition. His removal to the metropolis introduced him at once to an association with the most famous writers of the day; and, by the commendatory verses annexed to several of his productions, we learn that he reckoned many of them amongst his closest friends. The probity of his life confirmed into personal regard the admiration which was commanded by his genius.

The irregularity and length of the intervals that elapsed between the representation and the printing of successful dramas at this period, have led some bio-

graphers of the early days into mistakes as to the succession in which the plays of each author appeared; but we are enabled to determine with certainty, in nearly every instance, the order of production of Shirley's plays. The entries in the licence-books in most cases decide the point of time; and in the absence of that more direct and particular evidence, we have circumstantial suggestions in the prologues and dedications, and sometimes even contemporary allusions in the body of the scenes, which help us to the conjecture of dates that cannot otherwise be ascertained.

By an entry in sir Henry Herbert's book, we find that the tragedy of *The Maid's Revenge* was licen ed on the 9th February, 1625-6, exactly a year within a day of the date of his first piece. In his dedication of this play to Henry Osborne, Esq., Shirley states that it was his second production. "It is a tragedy," he observes, "which received encouragement and grace on the English stage; and though it come late to the impression [it was not printed until 1639], it was the second birth in its kind which I dedicated to the scene." Agreeably to the title-page, it was "acted with good applause at the private house in Drury Lane, by her majesties servants." We have a hint, towards the conclusion of the dedication, of the independence with which Shirley stood aloof from the allurements that surrounded him, disdaining the mean and servile arts by which some of his contemporaries propitiated the favour of the great. He says, "I never affected the ways of flattery: some say I have lost my preferment by not practising that court sin: but if you dare believe, I much honour you, nor is it upon guess, but the taste and knowledge of your ability and merit; and while the court wherein you live is fruitful with testimonies of your mind, my character is sealed up, when I have said that your virtue hath taken up a fair lodging." This manly spirit, which would be honourable to a struggling author in any age, was still more creditable at a time when literary panegyrics were the usual price of patronage. *The Maid's*

Revenge, although it appears to have been received with applause upon the stage, has fared ill amongst the critics, who content themselves with dismissing it as the worst of Shirley's tragedies, without caring to examine the merits which, even by this comparison, it may be presumed to possess. The story is derived from Reynold's old tract of *God's Revenge against Murder;* of which the poet has freely availed himself, heightening the terror of the incidents by the consummate art with which he developes them. The subject is, perhaps, too extravagant for representation, and would be scarcely endured by a modern audience; yet there is such a depth of pathos in the treatment, that the reader dwells upon it in the closet with an earnest and abiding interest. The scene is laid in Lisbon, and the spring of the plot is in the jealousy of a lady who plans the assassination of her younger sister, because she has attracted the love of a gallant she had marked out for herself. The father of these ladies had resolved that the younger daughter should not wed until the elder had been disposed of; and this circumstance not only gives a keener edge to the rage of the disappointed beauty, but casts the lovers into increased embarrassments. The favoured cavalier discovers a conspiracy to poison and carry off his beloved, in time to save her; and, intercepting the execution of the project, he succeeds in conveying her away to his own castle. In the meanwhile, his intimate friend, her brother, deceived into the belief that he has acted unworthily, challenges and slays him. The despair of the bereaved mistress now brings about the catastrophe that gives the tragedy its name: she poisons her sister, stabs her brother, and finally falls by her own hand. The accumulation of so many horrors reduces the tragic dignity of the play; but as such excesses were common to the drama of the seventeenth century, they are not specially chargeable as sins of taste against Shirley. The grand defect of the tragedy, is the rapidity of the action, arising unavoidably from the complexity of the events. The unamiable qualities

of one sister occupy of necessity so much space, that there is not room enough left to exhibit the gentler nature of the other; so that we do not sufficiently sympathise with her, to feel the force of that affliction in the agonies of which she accomplishes her revenge. But there is great beauty in the picture of the friends divorced from each other by a mistaken sense of honour, the grief of the survivor being more affecting than the death of his victim. In the scene where a shirking doctor plays off his delusive arts upon some credulous visitors, Shirley seems to have had the Alchemist of Ben Johnson in his thoughts; a comedy which was produced in 1610, and which was then highly popular; but cheats of that kind were fair game in the days of king James; and the sharpness of the satire, alloyed a little by the current grossness of the age, abundantly redeems the poet from the accusation of having too closely imitated his great prototype.

This tragedy was succeeded, in the following year, by the comedy of *The Brothers*, which was licensed on the 4th of November, 1626. According to the first edition of this piece, which was not published until the year 1652, when it appeared in an octavo volume, along with five other plays, it was "acted at the private house in Black Fryers." The popularity of *The Brothers* may be inferred from the fact, that it was revived immediately after the restoration. In this play, Shirley again takes Spanish ground, fixing the scene in the capital, Madrid. It is not a little remarkable, that Shirley, who was contemptuously and unjustly assailed by Dryden, in his fierce satire, *Mac Flecknoe*, had fallen into comparative oblivion, the martyr of a brother poet's ridicule, and was likely to have been at last completely forgotten, except by the few; when Dr. Farmer, in his celebrated essay on the learning of Shakspeare, published in the last century, drew from this comedy a passage of great beauty (Fernando's description of Jacintha at vespers), which he suggested as the probable original of the lines in Paradise Lost, where Uriel is

made to glide backwards and forwards to heaven on a sunbeam. The citation of this exquisite specimen of Shirley's fine imagination immediately drew attention to his works, which soon attracted the regard of critics capable of doing full justice to his merits; and, after a long period of neglect, they are now beginning to recover the popularity which they enjoyed in his own day, and which they eminently deserve.

The comedy of *The Brothers* is full of Spanish intrigue in its love affairs, which are abundantly perplexed by cross-purposes, but, as usual, cleared up in the end to the satisfaction of all parties. The story of the two Brothers exhibits an ingenious interplay of deceptions, each secretly loving the lady designed for the other by his father, but affecting to obey the parental commands until their mutual stratagem is discovered, and the eldest son is disinherited. We have in this piece a device which has since become common enough in our comedies, that of making the father feign death, in order to test the affection of the son. Thus, Don Ramyres, affecting to be deeply grieved by the disobedience of Fernando in falling in love with the dowerless Felisarda, instead of the rich Jacintha, who is privately betrothed to his younger brother Francisco, goes off the stage in an agony of rage, uttering maledictions on Fernando; a servant is despatched for a physician, who hastens to the chamber of the sick man; the leech is soon followed by a confessor, and the utmost bustle and suspense are kept up, until at length the death of Don Ramyres is announced, and the outcast Fernando is cut off with a trifling pension. This gives occasion to a scene of exquisite tenderness between Fernando and Felisarda, in which the former, bewailing his hard fortunes, resolves to make the noble sacrifice of resigning his mistress; while she, on the other hand, finding that he has lost his inheritance, is the more confirmed in her devotion. The contest of the lovers in this interview is sustained with great art, and in some of the passages recalls that beautiful ballad, the Nut-brown

Maid, which has been felicitously called a "flower in the winter solstice of our poetry." For example, Felisarda, discovering that Fernando is now as poor as herself, makes the most of the misfortune, by showing that it will render them both richer in love than they were before: —

"*Fel.* And if you be as poor as I, Fernando,
I can deserve you now and love you more
Than when your expectations carried all
The pride and blossoms of the Spring upon it.
"*Fer.* Those shadows will not feed more than your fancies;
Two poverties will keep but a thin table;
And while we dream of this high nourishment,
We do but starve more gloriously.
"*Fel.* 'Tis ease
And wealth first taught us art to surfeit by:
Nature is wise, not costly, and will spread
A table for us in the wilderness;
And the kind earth keep us alive and healthful,
With what her bosom doth invite us to;
The brooks, not there suspected, as the wine
That sometime princes quaff, are all transparent,
And with their pretty murmurs call to taste them.
In every tree a chorister to sing
Health to our loves; our lives shall there be free
As the first knowledge was from sin, and all
Our dreams as innocent."

So the Nut-brown Maid resolves to share the fortunes of her lover, and contrives to turn all his arguments to her own side. She maintains, that as she shared happiness with him, she ought also in reason to share his banishment.

"Syth I have here bene partnyère
With you of joy and blysse,
I must also parte of your wo
Endure, as reson is:
Yet am I sure of one plesure,
And, shortely it is this:
That, where ye be, me semeth, par dè.
I could nat fare amysse.
Without more speche, I you beseche
That we were sone agone;
For in my mynde, of all mankynde,
I love but you alone."

Like Felisarda, she thinks that the limpid waters will make a healthy substitute for more costly draughts.

> "Amonge the wylde dere, such an archère,
> As men say that ye be,
> Ne may I not fayle of good vitayle,
> Where is so greet plentè:
> And water clere of the ryvère
> Shall be full swete to me;
> Toill which in hele I shall ryght wele
> Endure as ye shall see."

That Shirley was acquainted with this sweet ballad, is not only probable, but, indeed, scarcely admits of any doubt. It was written somewhere about the close of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century; and must have been familiar to the lovers of poetry in his day, although it was afterwards lost amongst the numerous unclaimed trifles which found their way from time to time into print, and were dispersed in ephemeral publications, until they were afterwards recovered, and restored in such collections as those for which we are indebted to the zealous labours of bishop Percy and sir Henry Ellis. In the pathetic scene to which we have referred, there is much of the earnest feeling of the ballad; but the resemblance ceases with the sophistry, the action of the play requiring that Felisarda and Fernando should separate until circumstances develope the real situation of the lover, by bringing his father again alive upon the scene. Massinger, in his *City Madam,* has an incident similar to this, in which a merchant of London feigns death, with a view to punish the absurd ostentation of his wife and daughters. Some judicious alterations of that play were made by Mr. Dance, in 1771; but his version of the piece has not been preserved; while a very clumsy adaptation of the comedy, by sir James Bland Burgess, called *Riches, or the Wife and Brother,* still holds possession of the stage.

The next play in the order of production was the comedy

of *The Witty Fair One*, which was licensed on the 3d of October, 1628, and printed in 1632-3. In his dedication of the piece to sir Edward Bushell, Shirley observes, that "it wanted no grace on the stage;" and the revival of the play, after the author's death, further justifies the inference, that it was received with favour by the audience. But it is one of the least effective and most extravagant of all Shirley's productions. The plot makes too large a demand on the credulity of the spectator; and even the incidental beauties of the more serious parts fail to redeem the absurd levity of the remainder. The main interest is derived from the stratagem of a lively girl to reform her libertine lover; and this moral design is brought about by promising to gratify his illicit wishes in her chamber, and, when she has got him there, exposing him to her friends; after a dialogue, remarkable only for carrying the pruriency of the age to the utmost limits of speech. The discomfiture of the lover, in this scene, is followed by a still more incredible device. The lady and her confederates endeavour to persuade him that he is dead; and they go so far as to perform the ceremonies usual on such occasions. A hearse and tapers are brought upon the stage; and a long conversation ensues between the supposed spirit and his chastising mistress, in which she points out the errors of his life, and informs him how much she could have loved him had he been virtuous. After having taken so much trouble to reform him, the least that the profligate can do, is to renounce his evil courses; and by this means the moral and the marriage are worked out together. The whole of this strange plot is open to objections; but the author deserves the praise of having conducted it skilfully, and of diverting attention, by the force and beauty of the language, from the immediate absurdity of the incidents, to the ulterior object they are intended to accomplish. The other characters are of the common texture, and contribute but slightly to excite our interest.

The comedy of *The Wedding* follows next in the order of production. Mr. Gifford conjectures that it

was probably written between 1626, the year in which the Brothers was licensed, and 1629, when it first issued from the press. The sagacity of the conjecture is not very remarkable; since there is no doubt whatever that it must have been written, at all events, before the date of its publication, and probably two or three years before, there being no earlier trace of it. But we see no reason for throwing it back so far. *The Witty Fair One* was licensed in 1628, and *The Wedding* was printed in 1629, with six commendatory pieces of poetry, "as it was *lately* acted by her Majesty's servants at the Phœnix in Drury Lane." It is extremely likely, therefore, that it was written, not in 1626, but in 1628, the more especially as the first edition in print, of the date of 1629, distinctly affirms it to have been "lately acted." Shirley at this period lived by his dramatic labours, and, being a successful dramatist hitherto, it is not very probable that he was obliged to keep the play two years on his hands, which in his circumstances would have been a serious disappointment to him. A second edition of this play was brought out in 1633, and a third in 1660, when it was restored to the stage. It is worthy of observation, that the original edition of this play contains the names of the actors who filled the several characters; and as such an opportunity of recovering facts of this curious kind is not often afforded to us, we will avail ourselves of it to say a few words about the players; about whom, indeed, but few words can be said at this distance of time. The following is a transcript of the dramatis personæ.

Dramatis Personæ.	The Actors' Names.
Sir John Belfare	Richard Perkins.
Beauford, *a passionate lover of* Gratiana	Michael Bowyer.
Marwood, *friend to* Beauford	John Sumpner.
Rawbone, *a thin citizen*	William Robins.
Lodam, *a fat gentleman*	William Sherlock.
Justice Landby	Anthony Turner.
Captain Landby, *his nephew*	William Allin.
Isaac, *Sir* John Belfare's *man*	William Wilbraham.

Haver, *a young gentleman, lover of mistress* Jane, *disguised under the name of* Jasper.	John Young.
Camelion, Rawbone's *man,* - -	John Dobson.
Physician.	
Surgeon.	
Park-keeper.	
Ralph, *his servant.*	
Servants, Officers, &c.	
Gratiana, *Sir* John Belfare's *daughter* -	Hugh Clarke.
Jane, *Justice* Landby's *daughter* - -	John Page.
Lucibel, Cardona's *daughter, but disguised as a young man, under the name of* Millisceant, *and servant to Mistress* Jane	Edward Rogers.
Cordona, Gratiana's *maid* - -	Timothy Read.

Scene, London *and its environs.*

In a tract, called *Historia Histrionica* published in 1699, and said to have been written by Mr. James Wright, of New Inn, afterwards of Middle Temple, barrister at law, the intention of which was to exhibit in a dialogue a brief history of the stage during the two great periods of its popularity immediately preceding his own time—the reign of Elizabeth and the restoration—we find a few curious particulars relative to the actors of those days. One of the speakers in the dialogue laments that it was not the custom in the last age, that is, before the rebellion, to print the actors' names over against the parts they acted, "as they have done since the restoration," adding that, "thus one might have guessed at the action of the men, by the parts which we now read in the old plays." To this the interlocutor replies, that it was not the custom and usage of those days to do so; but mentions, at the same time, the titles of a few plays in which the names of the actors are preserved. These are, *The Duchess of Malfy; The Picture; The Roman Actor; The Deserving Favourite; The Wild-goose Chase* (at the Blackfriar's); *The Wedding; The Renegado; The Fair Maid of the West; Hannibal and Scipio; King John and Matilda* (at the Cock-pit); and *Holland's Leagues* (at Salisbury Court). The rarity of the usage renders the very few records of this kind that have descended

to us the more worthy of attention. According to this tract, which, being written near to the times of which it speaks, besides that it exhibits a very intimate acquaintance with the stage, must be admitted as an excellent authority; it would appear that *The Wedding* was acted at the Cockpit, and not at the Phœnix; the leading actors whom we find noted in the dramatis personæ being stated to belong to the company at that house. "Those of principal note at the Cockpit," observes one of the speakers, "were Perkins; Michael Bowyer; Sumner [no doubt the John Sumpner who played Marwood]; William Allen, and Bird, eminent actors; and Robins, a comedian." The Cockpit was one of the private houses, and was small in comparison with such theatres as the Globe, the Fortune, and the Bull. In the Cockpit, the Blackfriars, and Salisbury-court, which were all of the same description, and built nearly on the same model, they had "pits for the gentry, and acted by candle-light;" while the larger houses, as we have observed elsewhere, lay partly exposed to the weather, and the performances in them took place during the daylight. The William Allen, or Allin, here alluded to, who played captain Landby in *The Wedding*, does not appear to have been in any way connected with Edward Alleyn, who built the Fortune, and founded Dulwich hospital. When the rebellion was raised, and the stage put down, William Allen, in common with several of the other players, entered the king's service, and was a major and quarter-master-general at Oxford. Of the ultimate fortunes of the players who acted in *The Wedding*, all that is further known is, that Perkins and Sumner kept house together at Clerkenwell, where they died and were buried, some years after the restoration; but, upon Mr. Wright's report, they were all actors of good reputation, and of much greater ability in their profession than those who came after them. There is one very curious passage in this tract, contrasting the state of the stage before and after the reformation, from which we learn

that it had even then degenerated, both in morals and in skill,—a sort of practical homily on the impolicy of persecution. "Do not wonder," says the author, "but consider, that though the town was then, perhaps, not much more than half so populous as now, yet then the pieces were small (there being no scenes), and better order kept among the company that came, which made very good people think a play an innocent diversion for an idle hour or two, the plays themselves being then, for the most part, more instructive and moral: whereas, of late, the playhouses are so extremely pestered with vizard-masks and their trade (occasioning continual quarrels and abuses), that many of the more civilised part of the town are uneasy in the company, and shun the theatre as they would a house of scandal. It is an argument of the worth of the plays and actors of the last age, and easily inferred, that they were much beyond ours in this, to consider that they could support themselves merely from their own merit, the weight of the matter and goodness of the action, without scenes and machines; whereas the present plays with all that shew, can hardly draw an audience, unless there be the additional invitation of a signor Fideli, a monsieur l'Abbé, or some such foreign regale expressed in the bottom of the bill." One might almost think that this was written in the nineteenth, instead of the seventeenth century, so truly does it describe the degeneracy of the modern stage. The introduction of foreigners upon the stage, and the other vanities referred to, must be attributed to the restoration, which led to the adoption of many strange fashions in other things; but the corruption of the theatre was evidently gradual, as we learn that, for the first few years immediately ensuing upon that event, the profit of the players was considerable; every whole sharer, for example, in Mr. Hart's company, realising as much as 1000*l.* per annum.

The comedy of *The Wedding*, says Langbaine, is an excellent comedy, "considering the age in which it was writ." This criticism drew a sneer from Mr.

Gifford, which we think was not altogether merited. Langbaine's consideration of the age in which the play was written, is absolutely necessary to a just appreciation of its merits; for if the age be not taken into the account, we should be compelled to condemn unreservedly the texture of the plot. A lady is betrothed to an honourable man, who, upon the evening before the bridal day, is warned by a kinsman of her infidelity, the kinsman boldly asserting that he is himself the author of her disgrace. The lover, indignant at the charge, challenges the other, and in the duel his opponent falls, maintaining the truth of his accusation to the last. Under these circumstances, the lover breaks off with his mistress, reluctantly believing her to be false; but after some scenes, that help to deepen the mystery, the lady's fame is vindicated by the development of the base intrigue of a servant, which led to the misconception. The kinsman who was supposed to be slain, reappears, and all parties are reconciled. These grave incidents are very agreeably relieved by an infusion of humorous characters, and a very merry underplot, in which a lean and a fat citizen are suitors for the hand of a knight's daughter, and are both foiled by the lover of her own choice, who, after bringing them together in a rencontre, which, by the force of it, comicality, acts as a foil to the more serious combats succeeds in obtaining the consent of her father to his marriage. The groundwork of this plot is laid in an incident which cannot be brought so closely and constantly before an audience, and subjected to such severe questioning, as the lover, for the sake of his honour, is obliged to employ, without offence; and the only apology of which it admits, is that which Langbaine implies, when he alludes to the age in which it was produced. Nor is there so much power or individuality in the portraiture of the persons engaged in this part of the story, as to reconcile us to the unchaste thought that is interwoven through their speeches and actions, whenever they appear. But, making the requisite allowances

for the conception, the play is written with more skill than any of the previous productions of Shirley. There are some fine snatches of poetry in it; and the humorous scenes are especially admirable, exhibiting on the whole perhaps the most successful attempt of Shirley's in that way. The character of Lodam, a fat citizen, is a close study after Falstaff; and the scene where he affects the braggart against his will, in the hostile meeting with Rawbone at Finsbury, will remind the reader, although it is at a great distance from that great original, of Falstaff's mock bravery in the first part of Henry IV.

To this piece succeeded *The Grateful Servant*, which was licensed by the master of the revels on the 3d of November, 1629, under the title of *The Faithful Servant*. The first edition was printed in the following year, the second in 1637, and a third either in [illegible] or 1660. This play appears not only to have been received with an extraordinary degree of success, but to have drawn from Shirley's contemporaries a large measure of applause. Eleven copies of verses accompanied its publication, Shirley excusing himself for printing them, by declaring that they were "the free vote of his friends, whom he could not with civility refuse." Amongst his eulogists were Massinger, the poet Habington, and Randolph, and the sum of their panegyric is chiefly addressed to the simplicity and purity of Shirley's style, which is expressly praised by them all, and strongly contrasted with the bombast of other dramatists. Thus Stapylton opens his address:

> "I cannot fulminate or tonibruate words
> To puzzle intellects; my mirth less affords
> No Lycophronian buskins, nor can strain
> Garagantuan lines to gigantize thy vein;
> Nor make a jusjurand, that thy great plays
> Are tierra-del-fuegos or incognitas,
> Thy Pegasus, in his admired career,
> Curvets no caprioles of nonsense here."

We know not what style of writing Stapylton meant to satirise in these extravagant lines, unless it were the euphuistic pedantry of Lyly; which, however, must have been out of vogue at this period. From some lines in Randolph's verses, we are induced to conclude that the greater number of Shirley's plays were produced at the Cockpit, which agrees with the statement we have already referred to, concerning the actors at that house. It would appear also, by the same passage, that the Cockpit had formerly been used for the purpose implied in its title, and that it had subsequently been converted into a theatre for the representation of plays.

> "When thy intelligence on the Cockpit stage
> Gives it a soul from her immortal rage,
> I hear the Muses' birds with full delight
> Sing where the birds of Mars were wont to fight."

The Grateful Servant is in all respects one of the noblest of Shirley's productions. The characters are vigorously drawn and boldly contrasted; the dialogue is every where sustained with force and beauty; while the plot, sufficiently involved to keep the audience in suspense throughout, is brought to a single point with consummate art, and crowned with a healthy moral. If, in this play, some of the scenes run upon those licentious excesses, which, more than anything else, have banished the dramas of that age from the modern theatre, — yet the situations are managed with so much discretion, and there is so much delicacy and true refinement in the spirit with which they are treated, that the mind is not permitted to dwell upon the vices intermixed with the action, being carried away by the stream of a manly eloquence to the contemplation of their antagonist virtues. The duke of Savoy is represented as being in love with the princess of Milan, with whose charms he is acquainted only by her picture and public fame. In consequence, however, of an attempt to force her to marry her uncle, for some state purpose, the princess leaves Milan in the disguise of a page, and, falling amongst

banditti, is rescued by Foscari, a noble gentleman of Savoy, who is returning home from foreign service, to claim the affianced hand of a lady in his native city. In the meanwhile the duke, believing the princess to be lost to him, makes proposals to Cleona, the mistress of Foscari. Upon hearing this, Foscari, after having assured himself of Cleona's truth, generously resolves to relinquish his suit, for Cleona's sake, in favour of the duke, and causes a report of his death to be circulated. The princess, who is still disguised, is commissioned to announce the unwelcome news to Cleona; and, that office concluded, Foscari resolves to enter the order of St. Benet, endeavouring to prevail with Leonora, whom he believes to be a disappointed youth, to abandon the world at the same time. This hurries the progress of the events to the catastrophe. Lodwick, the duke's brother, a profligate who has planned his wife's dishonour, with a view to obtain a divorce, is, by an ingenious stratagem, won from his evil courses, and coming to confess to the abbot at the moment when Foscari approaches to take the habit, which the duke is invited to witness, all the characters are thus, by an apparent probability, brought together on the stage. The duke discovers the princess, and releases Cleona from his addresses; Foscari is restored to his mistress; and the penitent Lodwick is new married to his injured wife. The only questionable point in this scene, and which, remembering that Shirley was a Roman catholic, and must therefore be presumed to have been acquainted with the usages of the catholic church, cannot be readily accounted for, is, that the intended ceremony of admission to holy orders, which could take place only in the chapel, is appointed for the private lodgings of the abbot. This is a strange error in a dramatist who, particularly in this very play, discovers a constant sympathy with the catholic faith, especially in the speeches of father Valentio, and the admonitions of the abbot, preliminary to the renunciation of the world by Foscari. Mr. Gifford was so strongly impressed by the internal evidence of one pas-

sage, that he observes, in a note upon the text, that it is probable Shirley's confessor was of the Benedictine order.

The revival of this play in 1660, after Shirley's death, introduced on the English stage, we believe, for the first time, an actress in the dress of the other sex, when Mrs. Long played Dulcino. "The first time," says Downes, quoted by Mr. Dyce, "she appeared in man's habit, proved as beneficial to the company as several succeeding plays."

Two years elapsed between the production of this drama and the licensing of the tragedy of *The Traitor*, on 4th of May, 1631. This masterpiece of Shirley's muse, which is better known than any other of his plays, was first printed in 1635, and dedicated by the author to the earl of Newcastle, to whom he commends it as a piece which "in the presentment was rewarded with frequent applause." The tragedy continued to be regarded as Shirley's, until 1692, when it was revived, and a new edition was published. At the same time, there appeared the following observations in the Gentleman's Journal: — "*The Traitor*, an old tragedy, hath not only been revived the last month, but also been reprinted with alterations and amendments. It was supposed to be Shirley's, but he only usher'd it into the stage; the author of it was one Mr. Rivers, a Jesuite, who wrote it in his confinement in Newgate, where he died." Who Mr. Rivers was, or whether he possessed any claims on any other literary production, or, indeed, what his claims were upon *The Traitor* beyond this naked assertion of the authorship, we have now no means whatever of ascertaining. But the whole of the circumstances are so suspicious that, even if the character of the tragedy did not yield convincing testimony that it was written by Shirley, we could have no difficulty in rejecting the assumption of the authorship for Mr. Rivers, as an impudent attempt to defraud Shirley of his fame. Upwards of sixty years had elapsed from the date of the original production of *The*

Traitor, before this bold assertion was made; and, if there had been a grain of truth in it, the editor of the new version would, for his own sake, have taken care to show the grounds of the claim. But instead of venturing to establish the credit of Mr. Rivers by evidence of any kind, or even endeavouring to explain away the mystery which for so long a time, supposing Mr. Rivers to be the author, had deprived that person of his fair reward, this slandering editor dedicates the play to lord Clancarty (baron Blarney), and after a flourish of fulsome words, well becoming his lordship's Irish title, contents himself with observing, "I will not slander it [*The Traitor*] with my praise; it is commendation enough to say the author was Mr. Rivers:" and so the matter has rested ever since. The name of Mr. Rivers is nowhere to be found, except in those biographies that chronicle the cheat with which it is connected.

The Biographia Dramatica — a miscellany remarkable only as a "snapper up of unconsidered trifles"— gives us these particulars with a circumstantial gravity that would deserve reprehension, if the work were to be viewed as an authority in such matters. It deliberately states Mr. Rivers to be the author of the tragedy; the writer adding, that he imagines "it was never acted in its original form; but falling into the hands of Mr. James Shirley, he, with very considerable alterations and improvements of his own, brought it on the stage, and published it among his own works." We need scarcely observe, that this writer had no foundation for these remarks, beyond the single fact we have mentioned, — the assertion of the anonymous editor of an edition of the play published after it had held possession of the stage as Shirley's for upwards of sixty years. But it would be a very idle waste of time to expose a mis-statement which exists only in the pages of the Biographia Dramatica.

Another revival of this play was brought out in 1718, at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn, with alterations by Christopher Bullock, a comedian; but on this occasion

it does not appear that the name of Mr. Rivers was put forward. The last freedom that was taken with *The Traitor*, was in a tragedy by Mr. Sheil, called *Evadne, or the Statue*, which was partly derived from it, and was produced at Covent Garden theatre in 1819, with some success.

The merit of *The Traitor* lies in the intensity of the passion, and the depth of the colouring of individual character. The interest does not arise from any surprising incidents in the progress of the action, but from the truthfulness and earnestness with which the passions of the scene are depicted. Shirley appears to have thrown the whole vigour of his genius into this play, which transcends all his other productions in boldness of design and sustained energy in the execution. It is a drama of what Lamb described as Nature's nature, contradistinguished from Imagination's nature. The poetry in it, is not poetry welling up out of the fertile soil of the poet's fancy, and seeking a vent any where that it could be found; but poetry gushing out at every pore of the subject itself, every line of which is appropriate to the place it occupies, apparently necessary to the completeness of the expression; pregnant with thought and feeling, and rich with that sort of imagery which almost constitutes the language of passion. In the rest of his works, Shirley appears to have written under the impulse of a variety of moods; sometimes in weariness, sometimes in haste, sometimes labouring over the page, and working out painful and elaborate details, which at more felicitous moments would have been conjured up by a single *coup de plume*, — versatile, but unequal, occasionally loose or artificial, and at intervals condensed, forcible, and natural. But in this play his enthusiasm seems never to have abated, from the first scene to the last: the moral grandeur, the domestic pathos of this fine tragedy never flag for an instant. Something of the excellence of *The Traitor* must be referred to the nature of the plot; but even this would not have sufficed to absorb our sympathies so effectually, had not

the humanity that enters into it been depicted with such truth, that you are made not only to see its sufferings, but to feel them. There is but one great event in the drama, to which every thing else is subservient and tributary; the attention is concentrated on a single point, and thence the characters involved in it acquire a more distinct identity, and a more entire grasp of our feelings. The licentious duke of Florence entertains an unlawful passion for Amidea, the sister of Sciarrha, a Florentine of noble birth and ancient family, a man proud of his lineage, and full of honour. The duke promotes his designs through the agency of Lorenzo, his relative and favourite, who, however, is a traitor to the state and to his friend, and betrays the duke to Sciarrha, in the hope of winning him over to his conspiracy. The scene in which Sciarrha receives this intelligence, glows with fire; the outbreak of the brother's indignation kindles into a flame that lights up the whole play fiercely to the end. Sciarrha resolves that the roof which the duke — who comes to sup with him for the purpose — "would dishonour with his lust, shall be his tomb." But the gentle Amidea, as firm as she is pure, prevails upon him to appear to acquiesce in the duke's wishes, undertaking, when the time of trial arrives, to shame the duke from his base desires. Sciarrha consents, suffers the duke to be left alone with his sister, and conceals himself behind the arras to watch the issue. Amidea, by the strength of her virtue, succeeds; and the duke, moved by her resolution, atones for the evil of his thoughts by a temporary repentance. His professions of remorse dissolve the anger of the generous Sciarrha, who not only pardons him, but puts him on his guard against the treachery of Lorenzo. While these circumstances are in progress, Pisano, a gentleman to whom Amidea is betrothed, suddenly forms an attachment for another lady, and forsakes his former mistress. Sciarrha, whose excitable temperament is provoked to the height of resentment by this indignity, meets Pisano as the bridal procession is on its way to the church, and

kills him in the street. The scene previous to this, in which Amidea crosses the procession, entreats of Pisano to avoid her brother, and takes her leave of him for ever, is fraught with the most exquisite tenderness. The parting lines, in which she speaks of her own wedding, to

> "One, who will never
> Give cause I should suspect him to forsake me;
> A constant lover, one whose lips, though cold,
> Distil chaste kisses;"

is not surpassed in pathos by any similar passage in the language. Sciarrha is seized for the murder of Pisano; and here Lorenzo interposes a second time, with an offer from the duke, whom the wily traitor has again ensnared, of a free pardon, on condition that he will consent to his sister's dishonour. Sciarrha, after the burst of indignation is over, affects to accept the terms, and is permitted to return to his house to prepare his sister for the sacrifice. A scene of great power ensues, and Sciarrha, to save his sister's fame, stabs her. The catastrophe of the tragedy is appalling. The dead body of Amidea is conveyed at midnight to the duke's chamber, and the licentious prince is introduced by Lorenzo to the room where he believes the living Amidea is reposing. Left alone, his vicious blood rioting in anticipation, the duke draws the curtain, shrinks from the icy lips of the murdered Amidea, and, covered with horror, calls aloud for help. Lorenzo avails himself of the opportunity, rushes in, and murders the duke. Sciarrha and his brother arrive at this moment. Lorenzo, flushed with the success of his projects, now proclaims his seizure of the sovereignty; but Sciarrha draws upon him, and in the combat they are both mortally wounded.

The materials from which this tragedy is derived are susceptible of striking dramatic effects, of which the poet has happily availed himself. The characters are discriminated with great skill. Lorenzo, the crafty conspirator, the impetuous Sciarrha, thrown into imme-

diate contact with his gentle brother, and the pure, patient, and heroic Amidea, are all drawn in the colours of life. But the play is not free from faults. The title is not well chosen, since the interest turns, not upon Lorenzo, but upon the sacrifice of a virtuous lady: Sciarrha, not Lorenzo, is the hero. In making Sciarrha fall in with Lorenzo's conspiracy in a moment of exasperation against the duke, Shirley has suffered a noble mind to be warped from its strict course of rectitude by a gust of passion unworthy of its high nature: but having committed him to that act, and allowed him to become the confident of Lorenzo's plans, he reduces the integrity of his character still more, by making him betray Lorenzo to the duke. There is also this remarkable defect in the conduct of the plot: the triumph of Amidea, and the repentance of the duke, in the third act, produce a result that brings the interest up to that point to a complete termination; and what happens in the following act revives, but does not continue it. Thus we have a beginning, middle, and end, in the first three acts, which would be enough to satisfy the demands of the immediate occasion; but fresh circumstances subsequently arise, which re-open the story, and carry us on to ulterior events. The only justification that can be offered for thus finishing midway, and reviving the interest, is, that it enables the dramatist to close with an act of awful retribution, which leaves behind a more tragic impression and a deeper moral. Yet the assertion of innocence in the third act, its conquest over the gross passions of a licentious monarch, and the penitence it wins from him, constitute a moral of a very persuasive beauty.

In May, 1631, a play called *The Duke*, written by Shirley, was licensed by sir Henry Hubert; but no trace remains of it. The probability is, that it failed in the representation, and was never printed. In the November of the same year, it was followed by a tragedy, entitled *Love's Cruelty*, which bears evident marks of haste and negligence. This tragedy is crude, both in

conception and treament; and, although Burt's performance of the part of Clariana, and Mohun's Bellamente, are spoken of in the Historia Histrionica, where the revival of the play after the restoration, is also mentioned, we can hardly believe it could ever have been very favourably received by the audience. It abounds, as is usual with all Shirley's pieces, with bold and picturesque passages; but the plot is revolting. A lady's dishonour, wrought by her husband's intimate friend, at her own special instance, is the main incident. The husband discovers his disgrace in his wife's chamber, and spares the lives of the guilty pair; a scene which would not be tolerated in the present age. The paramour is about to be married in the last act, with a virtuous resolution to lead a reformed life, but yields to the solicitations of the injured lady, to see her again: their meeting is interrupted a second time by the husband, and the play ends in the deaths of all three. There is no room in the tragedy for pity. The husband hardly deserves our compassion; and every other character, with the exception of Eubella, who struggles firmly against the dishonourable proposals of the duke of Ferrara, and her father, who spurns the titles that are designed to purchase his daughter's virtue, excite no other sentiment than aversion.

Shirley's next production, *The Changes, or Love in a Maze*, which speedily followed the last,—for it appears that the poet, about this time, was driven to work hard for his support,—was brought out at the small theatre in Salisbury-court, which was then but newly erected. In the prologue, this change from one theatre to another is duly announced.

> "That muse whose song within another sphere
> Hath pleased some, and of the best," &c.

The "other sphere" was, as we have already shown, the Cockpit in Drury-lane, which was then in possession of all the plays Shirley had as yet written, except *The Brothers*, and which received several of his sub-

sequent productions. The comedy of *The Changes, or Love in a Maze*, is an admirable specimen of that species of humorous perplexity which the Italians call *imbroglio*. It is full of love embarrassments. One gentleman is in love with two sisters; there are several suitors besides for their hands; and there are some interchanges of partners, and some confusion in the progress of the fable, that render the action of the play exceedingly brilliant in its kind. An actor of the name of Lacy appears to have acquired a considerable reputation by the performance of Mumpe, the servant of a country knight; one of those parts in low comedy which afford ample scope for the talents of a stage humorist.

About this time, 1632, the celebrated Prynne became notorious for his opposition to theatrical performances, and especially for his publication of a fierce attack on the playhouses and the players, under the title of *Histriomastix*. In the violence of his bigoted zeal, Prynne could not dissemble his rage at the favours which the king bestowed upon the actors, and the countenance which the stage received from the queen and the ladies of the court; and his *Histriomastix* was consequently filled with personalities that gave great offence to royalty. For this work, as well as for other factious proceedings, Prynne was sent to the Tower, and sentenced by the Star Chamber to be fined 5000*l.*, to be expelled the university of Oxford and Lincoln's Inn, to be degraded from his profession of the law, to stand in the pillory in Palace Yard and also in Cheapside, and to be deprived of an ear in each place; to have his book publicly burned by the hands of the hangman, and to be imprisoned for life.* These punishments,

* Prynne's whole life was remarkable alike for the pertinacity with which he exposed himself to punishments, and the severity of the punishments he suffered. After taking his degree at Oxford, he removed to Lincoln's Inn, where he became successively barrister, bencher, and reader. He soon became a warm puritan; and the first fruit of his fanaticism was his Histriomastix. His imprisonment and other penalties did not subdue his restless spirit. He published a variety of works while he yet lay in confinement; and, for the reflections which some of them con-

which were all duly executed, ought, perhaps, to have been considered as an abundant expiation of his offence; but Shirley, heated no doubt by the excitement that prevailed at the time, inflicted an additional wound upon this intemperate enemy of the drama in an ironical dedication of a play, called *The Bird in a Cage,* which was printed in 1633, as having been presented at the Phœnix. In this dedication to Prynne, Shirley is unmercifully witty at the expense of the prisoner, whom he congratulates on his "happy retirement," considering himself fortunate in being able to present him so *aptly* with the *bird in a cage*. This piece of cruel irony was unworthy of Shirley; nor is the piece to which it is prefixed very creditable to his genius. It is unusually deficient in interest, and as meagre in style as in matter. The bird is a Mantuan princess, who is kept in close quarters by her father, until he shall find a fit suitor for her hand. This caging of the princess is no sooner resolved upon by the duke, than the lover of the princess, disguised as a merry adventurer, undertakes to gain access to her, in spite of all the duke's precautions. The duke accepts his challenge, on condition that, if he fail, he shall forfeit his life. The whole play is occupied with the attempts of the lover to penetrate the palace, in which he is at last successful, contriving to conceal himself in the pillar of a large birdcage, which is sent by

tained on Laud, he was sentenced to pay a second fine of 5,000*l.*; to lose the remainder of his ears (for it would seem that they were only clipped in the first instance), to be branded on both cheeks with the letters *S. L.*, for a schismatical libeller; and to be perpetually imprisoned in Caernarvon castle. He was released, however, in 1640, by an order of the house of commons; was afterwards elected a member of parliament; and became, in the revolution of events, the chief manager of the trial of his old persetor, Laud. He afterwards espoused the king's interest, and attacked Cromwell in his writings, for which he was again committed to prison Subsequently restored to his seat in the house of commons, he exhibited so injudicious a zeal for the restoration, that general Monk was forced to admonish him to be quiet. After the restoration, he was appointed keeper of the records and commissioner of appeals; but, for another highly dangerous and impudent publication, he was obliged to beg pardon of the house of peers. He died in Lincoln's Inn, where he was buried, under the chapel, in 1669. His works are very voluminous, making forty volumes in folio and quarto. His character was well and briefly expressed by Anthony Collins, who called him "a little, factious, scribbling fellow."

the duke as a present to his daughter. The plot of this piece is essentially farcical, and the liveliness of the dialogue fails to elevate the conception. M. Damaniant, a French writer, is, we suspect, indebted to it for the hint of a sprightly vaudeville, entitled *La Ruse contre Ruse, ou Guerre Ouverte*, which was adapted to the English stage by Mrs. Inchbald, in the popular trifle called the *The Midnight Hour.*

In 1632, Shirley produced a comedy called *Hyde Park*, which is memorable as being the first piece in which horses were introduced on the English stage. This play may be justly considered as one of the most felicitous compositions of the poet in this style. Its wit is refined, elastic, and aerial; and the sportiveness of the dialogue, sparkling through a plot of the lightest but most ingenious texture, admits of no cessation throughout. It is emphatically a comedy of manners, and brings before us in the most vivid colours a striking picture of the fops, lovers, and coquets of the day. The lively mistress Carol is the prototype of many a provoking heroine of modern comedy; and it is not improbable that Southern may have been assisted in the plot of the *Fatal Marriage* by the episode of Bonavent and his wife.

Of the next play in the order of production, *The Ball*, which was licensed in 1632, and published in 1639, some difference of opinion exists as to the authorship. It was published as the joint production of Chapman and Shirley. Mr. Gifford attributes the largest portion of it to the former, while Mr. Dyce is disposed to assign nearly the whole of it to the latter. The entry of the licence in sir Henry Herbert's book ascribes it to Shirley alone; but it might have been so presented merely for convenience, or by accident. It is very difficult to detect, with any approach to critical satisfaction, a particular hand in this play, except in some passages where Shirley stands visibly out on the canvass. The rest might be Shirley's, or might be Chapman's; for it is so volatile and evanescent, that the

peculiar manner of the writer, whoever he may have been, is obscured in the eccentricity of the subject. *The Ball* appears to have been intended as a satire, couched in a clever plot, upon a practice then in vogue amongst some people of fashion, of meeting together to entertain themselves in private with masques and dances. At those orgies,—which resembled in some measure the mysteries of the Hermitage of Catherine of Russia, although we may venture to affirm that they were not quite so immoral,—a gilt ball descended from the ceiling—the ball of Venus,

> "Which Paris gave on Ida hill—"

and this was the signal for the revels, which were none of the most chaste, to begin. The voluptuous pranks that were played on these occasions, Shirley evidently softened in the representation, as he confesses in the following lines in the *The Lady of Pleasure*, when, after describing the nocturnal meeting, he goes on to say,—

> "'Tis but the family of Love translated
> Into more costly sin! There was a play on 't,
> And had the poet not been brib'd to a modest
> Expression of your antic gambles in 't,
> Some darks had been discovered, and the deeds too;
> In time he may repent, and make some blush,
> To see the second part danc'd on the stage." *

Yet, notwithstanding that he treated the subject with some indulgence, he gave great offence by the freedom of his scenes, as we learn from the following observations by sir Henry Herbert, annexed to the entry of the licence:—"In the play of *The Ball*, written by Shirley, and acted by the queen's players, there were divers personated so naturally, both of lords and others of the court, that I took it ill, and would have forbidden

* "We have," says Mr. Gifford, speaking of this comedy, "the first rude specimen of what are now termed subscription balls." Either Mr. Gifford's notion of subscription balls was strangely erroneous, or he must have taken very little pains to inform himself of the character of the midnight revels described by Shirley.

the play, but that Biston promiste many things which I found faulte withall should be left out, and that he would not suffer it to be done by the poett any more, who deserves to be punisht; and the first that offends in this kind, of poets or players, shall be sure of publique punishment." The subject of this comedy being wholly temporary, it is, in its humour, like faded tinsel, with here and there a precious gem of permanent lustre.

Sir Henry Herbert's office, at this period, brought a variety of troubles upon him, in which the players participated as well as the poets. It was found to be impossible to keep the stage free from profanity, although there was an express law of James's which visited with a penalty of 10*l.* any individual who should wantonly use the name of God or the Trinity in any play or interlude. This statute was constantly violated; and on one occasion the players were cited before the high commission court, and severely censured for the employment of oaths in Ben Jonson's *Magnetic Lady*. In their defence they attempted to throw the responsibility on the poet and the master of the revels; but at length confessed that the objectionable passages were interpolated by themselves. The unpleasant circumstances in which sir Henry was placed by these vexatious proceedings, and by the obstinacy of both poets and players, appear to have galled him into a harsh exercise of his authority, as one of his entries about this time testifies: — "The kinge," he states, "is pleas'd to take *faith, death, slight,* for asseverations, and no oaths, to which I doe humbly submit as my master's judgment; but under favour conceive them to be oaths, and enter them here, to declare my opinion and submission." This note was upon a play of Davenant's. Shirley, profiting by the example of those who had fallen under the condemnation of the authorities for the licentiousness of their plays (a fault from which his own were by no means exempt), appears to have applied himself with so much care to his next production, *The Young Admiral*, as to produce a piece

that was not only free from those blameable excesses, but that extorted from sir Henry himself a liberal panegyric, recorded in his office book. "This comedy," observes sir Henry, "being free from oaths, profaneness, or obsceanes, hath given me emuch delight and satisfaction in the readinge, and may serve for a pattern to other poets, not only for the bettring of maners and language, but for the improvement of the quality, which hath received some brushings of late." *The Young Admiral* is, for its age, a remarkably chaste play. The language is pure, and well considered; and the characters, without possessing much marked individuality, are animated with a life-like energy in the situations into which they are thrown. The play opens with a warlike prelude, that promises a tragical progress; but the dramatist, with exquisite skill, softens it down, as the action advances, into a mere domestic and personal interest; the clouds that overlay the early acts gradually dissolve, and disclose a burst of sunshine, in which the issue of the tangled history is accomplished. Vittori, the admiral of Naples, is the successful rival of the young prince, and, after achieving a great victory over the Sicilians, is, on a slight pretext, banished the realm, with Cassandra, his mistress. They take boat, but are cast back by a storm, and wrecked on the shore just as the king of Sicily has landed with his troops to besiege Naples. Vittori is made prisoner; but the alternative is submitted to him, of taking arms against his country, or seeing his mistress put to death. The struggle is too much for his virtue, and he yields. In the meanwhile his father is a prisoner at Naples, and the prince threatens to execute him upon the first blow struck by Vittori. Out of this dilemma their appears to be no deliverance; when the princess of Sicily, who secretly loves the prince of Naples, causes Cassandra to write to him, inviting him to visit her in the Sicilian camp. The prince, blinded by passion, accepts the invitation; but he no sooner reaches the camp than he is seized by the Sicilian troops. Fresh difficulties now arise; and the princess resolves to risk her

own safety in an attempt to save her lover and terminate the war. She goes secretly to Naples, and surrenders herself into the hands of the king. There are now royal hostages on both sides, which, of course, brings about an amicable settlement of affairs, and the union of the prince and princess, and the reconciliation of Vittori to his country, conclude the play. The action of *The Young Admiral* is rapid, and crowded with incidents effectively managed. The only doubt that could check the hope of reviving this piece with success on the modern stage, is that the interplay of visits from camp to camp, in the fourth and fifth acts, might be felt to be monotonous in representation. This play was presented at St. James's before the royal family, and was received with much approbation by the king and queen.

A piece called *The Beauties* is registered as Shirley's, and bears the date of Jan. 21. 1632-3, but is lost; and another was licensed in November, 1634, called *The Gamester*. "This play," says sir Henry Herbert, "was made by Shirley out of a plot of the king's given him by me; and well likt. The king said it was the best play he had seen for seven years." But it would appear that Shirley was indebted to other sources for some of the best parts of his plot. A profligate husband, in this comedy, makes improper advances to a kinswoman of his wife's, residing in his house, and, by a stratagem between the wife and her friend, the lady promises to give him a meeting, and appoints the time, it being secretly arranged that the wife is to take her place. When the time arrives, the husband is engaged at play in a gambling-house, and, excited by ill-luck, borrows money from a licentious companion, whom he sends home to keep his appointment in his stead. On the arrival of the substitute, he discovers the two ladies prepared to receive and shame the faithless husband, and he readily falls into their plot, and describes to his friend the meeting as if it had taken place. The husband, discovering that his wife had arranged to take her friend's place, believes that he is dishonoured by his

own intrigue; but, in the end, the integrity of all parties is satisfactorily cleared up. Langbaine traces this portion of the comedy to the *Ducento novelle del signor Celio Malespini;* and the same story is told in queen Margaret's novels. The intrigues are managed with the art of a practised dramatist, and the dialogue abounds with vivacity. It must be admitted that the tone of the piece is reprehensibly licentious, but the moral with which it closes makes some amends for the levity through which the plot is conducted. *The Gamester* was originally published in 1637, and afterwards in 1744, and again in 1780. It has been re-adapted to the stage three times; by Charles Johnson, in 1711, under the title of *The Wife's Revenge, or the Husband's Cure;* in 1758, by Garrick, who, according to the Biographia Dramatica, spoiled it, with the title of *The Gamesters;* and again, in 1827, by Mr. Poole, under the name of *The Wife's Stratagem, or more frightened than hurt.* The last piece was in three acts, met with a quiet success, and was speedily put aside. The adapter had reduced the spirit of the comedy, in trying to make it conform to the spirit of the age.

The industry of Shirley throughout these numerous labours must have been considerable; and this year, 1633, appears to have been one of the most industrious of his life. In addition to the comedy of *The Gamester,* he published a quaint dramatic poem, or, as Mr. Dyce calls it, a moral interlude, called *A Contention for Honour and Riches,* in which, by way of allegory, he brings out some excellent practical truths; prepared, or finished for the stage, a play of Fletcher's, called *The Night Walkers,* which the poet had left behind unfinished; and wrote the masque of *The Triumph of Peace**, which was represented at court with extraordinary splendour. The object of this masque, which was got up by the four inns of court, was to demonstrate,

* "Shirley is supposed, also," observes Mr. Dyce, "to have fitted for the stage three other dramas of his deceased friend: *Love's Pilgrimage, The Noble Gentleman,* and *The Lover's Progress.*

by a loyal tribute to the king and queen at Whitehall, the difference of opinion that existed between those learned societies, and such disaffected persons as had embraced the new doctrines laid down in Mr. Prynne's Histriomastix, and similar works. No trouble or expense was spared to give effect to this grand entertainment, which is said to have cost the enormous sum of upwards of 21,000*l.** Shirley, the last of the great race of dramatists, was engaged to invent the masque; William Lawes and Steven Ives were employed to compose the music; and the requisite scenery was prepared for the performance in the lower end of the banqueting-room in Whitehall, by Inigo Jones. The masquers were gentlemen belonging to the four inns of court; and the committee appointed to superintend the whole, included, amongst others, the following distinguished persons:—Edward Hyde (afterwards earl of Clarendon), Whitelocke, Mr. attorney Noy, and Selden. The masquers assembled at Ely House, in Holborn, and proceeded through the streets in a gorgeous procession, a full account of which, written by Shirley, will be found prefixed to the poem.† The gentlemen who were to play in the masque were elevated in chariots; and when the multitude reached the palace, the king and queen were so delighted with it, that they desired to see the procession move about the tilt-yard, that they might the better satisfy their curiosity in a second view of it. The performance was received at court with so much applause, that their majesties commanded a repetition of it in the city, when they afterwards came to sup with the mayor.‡ The masque is written with a subtle conception, and in a fine masculine vein of poetry. If it lack those aerial and sportive graces, and that exquisite lyrical beauty and flowering fancy, by which the *Comus* of

* According to Whitelocke, the expenses must have reached to at least 10,000*l.* more.

† See Gifford's edition of Shirley, vol. vi.

‡ Some account of this pageant will be found in Mr. Lister's recent *Life of Clarendon*, and frequent allusions are made to it in almost all the diaries that have of late been gleaned from the MSS. of the seventeenth century.

Milton is distinguished, — there is a boldness both of design and expression in it, which being, we may presume, new to the court, must have equally surprised and gratified the hearers. It was evidently written to produce effect in the exhibition, and not in the hope of surviving as a poem. It is a scenic masque, through which the dialogue threads like a light to illuminate the allegory.

The comedy of *The Example* followed this masque, in June, 1634. The more serious parts of this comedy are the best. The wife of an honourable gentleman, who is absent and in debt, is sorely pressed by the dishonourable advances of a lord, who holds her husband's estates in mortgage. After many fruitless stratagems to subdue her to his wishes, the nobility of her nature effects a complete revolution in his feelings; he repents of his base designs, and, as a token of the respectful friendship she has inspired, he presents her with a full quittance of her husband's obligations. The husband returns; and upon learning that he is freed by the act of the lord, suspects that it has been at the cost of his honour, and challenges him. While this is pending, a knavish agent of the lord causes the husband to be arrested; but the lord releases him from prison; and fearing that the world may suppose he had connived at his arrest for the purpose of evading the duel, he conceives he is bound to vindicate his courage by forcing the husband, who is now satisfied of the injustice of his suspicions, to give him a meeting. The struggle on the part of the husband is admirably depicted; and the whole conduct of the plot, the duel, and the reconciliation, cannot be surpassed in vigour and truthfulness. The characters of sir Walter and lady Peregrine, and lord Fitzavarice are conceived with great power. The part of sir Solitary Plot is full of a rich comic gusto; it is the Kitely of Ben Jonson mellowed into comedy.

In November, 1834, *The Opportunity*, a very lively and amusing piece, was licensed. The hint of this play was probably derived from the *Measure for Measure,*

and the *Comedy of Errors* of Shakspeare. It turns upon the circumstance of a Milanese gentleman being mistaken, at the court of Urbino, for a nobleman of that place, who had been banished for some years, in consequence of having killed another in a duel. The personal resemblance is so strong, that all the courtiers, and even the father of the banished man fall into the mistake; his sister alone, with a true woman's instinct, doubting his identity from the first. The perpetual play of the equivoque, arising out of this very improbable blunder, supplies a constant source of mirth in a variety of ways. *The Opportunity* was published in 1640, and, as well as *The Example,* was revived after the restoration. Shirley, in his dedication of it to captain Owen, alludes to his visit to Ireland, which took place between the production of this piece on the stage and its publication.

It was succeeded in the following February by *The Coronation,* which was licensed as a play of Shirley's; but which was ascribed in the title-page of the first edition, in 1640, to John Fletcher, and continued as his in every subsequent edition of the works of Beaumont and Fletcher. Against this claim of the first edition on behalf of Fletcher, we have to put the direct assertion of Shirley himself, who in 1652-3 published a volume of his plays, and at the end of one of them, *The Cardinal,* enumerates the several dramatic pieces written by him, *The Coronation* amongst the rest, adding, that it had been "falsely ascribed to Fletcher." This testimony is direct enough, at all events; and as Fletcher was dead ten years before the piece was produced, it is reasonable to give Shirley the credit of the authorship. Whether the skeleton of the play, or detached scenes of it, might not have been found amongst the remains of Fletcher, confided to the care of Shirley, is matter of conjecture which it would now be idle to discuss. Sympson, one of the commentators on Beaumont and Fletcher, is willing to leave Shirley in possession of the disputed honour; but we cannot strengthen Shirley's claim by his

authority, as his opinion was founded upon a mistake in the evidence to which he refers. The plot of this play is confused, and the sameness of different parts of the action takes away from the interest, by repetition of similar scenes. It does not appear to have been popular on the stage, and has never been revived.

The tragedy of *Chabot, Admiral of France*, which is derived from the French histories of the reign of Francis I., was licensed in April, 1635, as the first production of Chapman and Shirley; but the last editor of Shirley's works is of opinion that nearly the whole play was written by the former. An attentive examination of the piece must convince the reader of the sagacity of this judgment. It wants the dramatic genius of Shirley, and has much of the descriptive and didactic weight of Chapman; that "full and heightened style" which Webster describes as Chapman's peculiar characteristic. There are some fine scenes in this tragedy — especially the trial scene, where Chabot is accused of high crimes, which accusation, although he is subsequently cleared, finally breaks his spirit; but they are better adapted for the closet, where their power and prolonged passion can be more truly appreciated, than to the stage, which requires a more rapid appeal to the sympathies. Chapman's plays are full of thought, but deficient in action.

Shirley's next production was *The Lady of Pleasure*, which was licensed in October 1635, and published in 1637. The success of this piece we have enough of grounds for believing was considerable; and Shirley describes it, in the dedication, as a "comedy fortunate in the scene, and one that may challenge a place in the first form of the author's compositions." But while it sparkles all through with pleasantry, the licentiousness of its scenes must always condemn it in the estimation of modern readers. It is the grossest of all Shirley's productions, and its grossness is so deeply seated in its texture, that it would not be possible to purify it for the stage by the severest process of ampu-

tation. The lady of pleasure is a lady who comes from the country, to indulge in the revelries of the town, who sacrifices her virtue in the pursuit of the coarsest enjoyments, and is at last reformed by the pretended ruin of her husband. The gallants of this comedy carry the licentiousness of the stage to its utmost excess. A ridiculous and offensive incident in this play, is apparently imitated from a similar scene in *The Grateful Servant;* and Mrs. Behn, who was as little scrupulous about private morals as about the morals of the stage, did not hesitate to embody it in her play of *The Lucky Chances.*

About this period Shirley visited Ireland, under the patronage, says Gilchrist, of the earl of Kildare. At that time the earl of Stafford was lord deputy; and John Ogilby, the translator of Homer and Virgil, labours in which he was much assisted by Shirley, was master of the revels, a fortunate circumstance for our poet. Ogilby had just then erected a theatre in Werburgh-street, where Shirley produced his *Royal Master,* which was also acted at the Castle, before the lord deputy. The date of the licence of this comedy in [illegible]nd, is April, 1638; but it had been previously pre[illegible]ed in Dublin. It is a dull conception, and there are [illegible]y traces of negligence and hurry in its composition. It was speedily followed by the tragedy of *The Duke's Mistress,* wh[illegible]s entered by sir Henry Herbert, in January, 1635-6; and must, therefore, be presumed to have been written about the same time. This piece can hardly aspire to the dignity of a tragedy; for, although it is of a very moving interest, it is sprinkled with so much comic humour, and terminates with such joy to all parties concerned, except a villanous courtier, whose plots are detected and defeated, and a treacherous knave, who comes by his death, like Polonius, whilst he is hiding behind the arras, that its final impression does not answer the ends and demands of tragedy. The duke of Parma, neglecting his noble lady, is enamoured of a younger beauty, who is per-

mitted to command all things at court, and who avails herself of her unlawful privileges so freely as to inspire aversion in the first instance. But the return of her former lover restores her to virtue; and after some vicissitudes arising from her situation, she is honourably married, and the duke is reconciled to his wife. There is not much character in this play, with the exception of the duchess, whose constancy shines steadily through the piece.

The Doubtful Heir, originally produced at the Dublin theatre, under the name of *Rosania, or Love's Victory,* in 1740, was published in 1652, as having been acted at "the private house in Black-friers." The subject of this play is in some parts disagreeable; nor is there any recompence in the treatment for that which is meagre or unpleasant in the design. The king of Murcia, who comes to assert his right to the throne of Arragon, with his mistress in the disguise of a page, is taken prisoner by his cousin, the young queen, who dealing with him as an impostor, submits him to trial for treason; but suddenly falling in love with him, marries him, to the great amazement of the whole court. By this marriage the king violates his faith to the fair Rosania, and conjecture is lost in devising a means of rectifying his honour. The contrivance by which the marriage is dissolved, and Rosania righted, is sufficiently clumsy, and beneath the reputation of so skilful a dramatist. Indeed, all the pieces which Shirley wrote for the Dublin theatre, seem to have been thrown off very carelessly; but the most remarkable failure amongst them, is a strange drama, called *St. Patrick for Ireland,* in which the miracles of the patron saint are brought upon the stage with such ludicrous solemnity, that if it were not for the gravity of the language, and the elaborate structure of the piece, we should be almost tempted to suspect that it was intended as a sort of serious burlesque. In this piece, which Shirley meant to have followed up with a second part, St. Patrick is introduced with a host of attendant angels, the religion of the

ancient Irish is confounded with the Roman mythology, and the saint is exhibited in real earnest driving out the snakes and toads, "like a Hector," and performing all the other absurdities that are attributed to him in the vulgar superstitions of the country. Shirley, doubtless, designed this play as a complimentary tribute to a people from whom he had received many acts of kindness and hospitality; but it is a pity that he did not believe them to be worthy of a better offering.

We have no very certain guide to the next production of Shirley, *The Constant Maid*, which was printed in 1640, without any reference to the theatre where it was acted, but was reprinted in 1667, as having been performed at the "new play house called the Nursery in Hatton-garden." An edition was also printed in 1661, under the title of *Love will finde out the way*, by T. B., as acted at the Phœnix. Who T. B. was, is not known; but probably he was one of the players, who stood sponsor for the revival. Mr. Gifford conjectures that it was produced between 1636 and 1639, during the poet's absence in Ireland. The plot is lively and brilliant, and has since been rendered familiar to the stage in several pieces. The Biographia Dramatica says, that the incident where a gallant affects to court the widow, while he is really in treaty with her daughter, is borrowed from other plays; but we are not aware of the sources to which the critic alludes.

The Constant Maid was succeeded by *The Humorous Courtier*, which was published in 1640, as having been played at the private house in Drury-lane. This is a comedy in which the animal spirits and gay contrivances of the actors are put to their highest stretch. Its chief point lies in the humour of the duchess of Mantua, who declares her intention to choose a husband, which sets all the lords in her court, according to their several tastes, plotting to gain her favour. The courtier who gives the title to the comedy, is originally a woman-hater; but, tempted by the chance of securing the favour of the duchess, he runs into the opposite extreme. They

are all disappointed, however, reproved for their several artifices, and the choice falls upon the duke Parma, who has been at court all the time in disguise. In this play, Shirley, who copied his own plots on two or three occasions, makes a courtier connive at the dishonour of his wife, for the purpose of obtaining a divorce, a device which the poet had previously employed in the comedy of *The Grateful Servant*. The original text of this play is sadly defective. Mr. Gifford observes, that the quarto edition is in the most deplorable state; "in the other plays," he adds, "some fair advances are made toward sense and metre; but in this unfortunate piece, all pains seem to have been cast aside; for (to say nothing of omissions in almost every speech) the text too frequently appears as if the types had tumbled out of the boxes, and been set up at random."

The *Arcadia* of Sidney, which one would think was inaccessible to the addresses of the dramatic muse, furnished a subject for the industrious Shirley, who turned it into a pastoral drama, that was represented at the Phœnix, and printed in 1640. The only merit of this production, is its closeness to the cumbrous romance, the chief incidents of which are embraced in its scenes. It could hardly have been very successful on the stage; since even in the closet, it is ponderous and lifeless. In *The Gentleman of Venice*, a tragi-comedy, which was licensed probably about the same time, in 1639, but not printed until 1655, Shirley made reparation for the injustice he committed against his muse in the composition of the *Arcadia*. His want of success in the lighter style of writing, where the place of action, thought, and passion is expected to be supplied by a creation of fancy, is not more apparent in his masque of *The Triumph*, and his dramatised romance, than his complete satisfaction of the full requisition of the scene, whenever he took up a subject of domestic interest in which, as in *The Gentleman of Venice*, the more serious parts were relieved by an under-current of brisk comedy. The purpose of the play is, perhaps, not strictly moral,

although it has a moral issue; but it is managed with consummate skill, and so artfully are the scenes contrived, that the spectator is kept in suspense to the accomplishment of the catastrophe. The notion of kidnapping a gentleman, blinding his eyes, and carrying him into a palace, with a view to supply the deficiency which the longing wishes of a nobleman in vain anticipate, is an unlikely incident: such things, however, have happened; and the dramatist was warranted, upon any hint from real life, in working up the circumstance to its full development. He has made the hero of this adventure an Englishman, and a catholic. His religion might be pardoned, as Shirley was a catholic himself, and thought, no doubt, that all Englishmen ought to be catholics; but there was no excuse for giving him the Italian name of Florelli.

The next play of Shirley's in the order of time, that has descended to us, is *The Imposture,* which was licensed in November, 1640, and printed in 1652, as having been acted "at the private house in Blackfryers." But two other plays of his, that were entered in the book of the Stationers' Company in 1639, are lost: these were, *St. Albans,* a tragedy; and *Looke to the Ladie,* a comedy. *The Imposture* was the first of Shirley's productions after his return from Ireland; and he says, in the dedication, that it "had a fair reception when it was personated on the stage, and may march in the first rank of my own compositions;" which shows that he esteemed it to be equal to *The Lady of Pleasure,* of which he made a similar declaration. It is doubtful, however, whether the modern reader will admit this judgment to be accurate. The incidents are somewhat strained for effect, beyond the line of probability, and follow each other towards the close so precipitately, that the scene becomes confused. This kind of breathless haste to crowd in a variety of circumstances, most of which are superfluous in action, greatly reduces the dignity of the tragi-comedy. There is not enough of repose in the play; there is no deve-

lopment of character—no delineation of passion; it is a romance put into a dramatic form.

The prince of Ferrara terminates a war he had carried forward against Mantua, by agreeing to a marriage with the duke's daughter; but by a stratagem between the duke and a courtier, who is secretly a suitor for the hand of the princess, the courtier's mistress is passed off for the daughter of Mantua. This would be well enough, but that the woman is a nun; and the prince, who asks her in marriage, is brought to the nunnery to prefer his petition. The inconsistency of placing a nun in such circumstances, is glaring; and the matter is not mended by her declaration, that she made a vow to pass a year amongst the sisterhood; for if that were so, she would be a novice, and not a nun. But in any case the contrivance is not very felicitous. The prince, baulked by the affected reluctance of the lady whom he believes to be the princess, takes her away by force, and conveys her to Ferrara, at which place the real princess, making her escape from Mantua for some unexplained reason, has just arrived. The cross-purposes, half tragic half comic, now begin; and after a variety of escapades, the play concludes by the union of the prince and princess, in neither of whose fortunes we feel the least interest; and who seem to be drawn together by the attraction of rank, upon discovering themselves to each other, without having previously exhibited a spark of tenderness or passion. There is occasionally a little too much of this sort of conventional sentiment in Shirley's plays. He seems to have acquired a facility in winding up his plots with a certain propriety in reference to royal and noble heroes and heroines, just as if the audience thought that none but people of equal rank should be married to each other, and as if they looked to such consummations as matters of course, and as a regular quittance of poetical justice. Perhaps it was the vice of the age; but it must be confessed that it often deprives Shirley's dramas of those finer uses of practical philosophy which the poet was abundantly capable of dis-

playing. In this respect Shirley lacked an enlarged and comprehensive aptitude for moral beauty: there was not much heartiness or cordiality in his stage nature; he does not seem to have been moved by a deep sympathy with the struggles of virtue; but rather to have placed the pomp of station, and the external fitness of things, over and above all other considerations. It would be unjust, however, not to acknowledge, that wherever — as, for example, in the tragedy of *The Traitor* — he has relied upon more solid materials than the mere accidents of birth and the transitions of fortune, he has shown himself able to inspire them with a language and a shape of enduring truth.

The tragedy of *The Politician* appears to have been Shirley's next production. There is no note of its having been licensed by the master of the revels; but Mr. Gifford conjectures that it is the same play as *The Politique Father*, which was licensed in May, 1641. He is of opinion, however, that it may have been produced as early as 1639, in Ireland. It was published in 1655, as it was presented at Salisbury Court. This is one of the worst of Shirley's tragedies. The plot is spoiled by a cluster of incidents that choke each other up, and give it something of the air of an extravagant melodrame on stilts. The marriage of a king of Norway with the base widow of a lord, to the shame and discontent of the court; the projects of a cunning minister to advance his views through the agency of the queen; the rebellion of the king's son, brought about by these circumstances; and the final settlement of the feuds, through the deaths of nearly all the principal persons concerned, constitute the action of the play. There is not a single character in it that makes a permanent impression, and scarcely a scene that is not blurred with improprieties or inconsistencies of some sort. Shirley appears to have taken leave of the drama when he published this play. In his dedication, he says: "For my own part, this is the last which is like to salute the public view in this kind:" but in tracing these plays, we follow the dates of

their production, which marks the order of their composition; and not the dates of their publication, which often lingered long after they were presented on the stage.

In November 1641, the tragedy of *The Cardinal* was licensed. This play, it appears, was ushered upon the stage without any designation of the class to which it belongs, as we learn from the prologue:

> "I will say nothing positive; you may
> Think what you please; we call it but a play:
> Whether the comic Muse, or ladies' love,
> Romance, or direful tragedy it prove,
> The bill determines not—"

That he esteemed it to be his best performance, he hints a little farther on; and in the dedication he calls it "the best of his flock." From this opinion we do not scruple unhesitatingly to dissent. It deserves to take the next place to *The Traitor*; but it is inferior to that production in the depth, truth, and greatness of the conception. Mr. Dyce says, that "there can be little doubt that, while composing this tragedy, Shirley kept his eye on Webster's *Duchess of Malfy*; but we cannot help thinking that the kind of resemblance which exist between them, will not be found to justify this suspicion. Webster's drama is crowned with horrors of so direful and appalling a cast, that they hardly seem to belong to the earth, and the catastrophe is as fearful as some terrible sequel to the rage of demons. The profound terrors of that play belong to the creations of an intense but fantastic imagination; and we can hardly regard them as the machinery of a drama of humanity, but rather of some masque of spirits. Now, in *The Cardinal*, the whole business of the scene touches us nearly. The actors in it are all beings like ourselves, influenced by the common motives of life under the circumstances in which they are involved, and we are conducted by natural and obvious steps to the conclusion. The single point of likeness, in the marriage of the duchess, and the murder of her husband on the wedding

night, by the fierce and disappointed lover, is not enough to establish that "general resemblance" which Mr. Dyce thinks could "scarcely have been accidental." Indeed we are at a loss to discover a general resemblance: on the contrary, every thing that follows the making away with the bridegroom is totally different in both plays. In the one case the bride is imprisoned by her brother, for marrying below her degree, and then persecuted by a slow vengeance, that excels in the cruelty of its devices the wildest inventions of the most daring of our dramatists. In the other, the bereaved wife garners up in her heart the project of revenge, which is accomplished at last, by other means, at once probable and just, satisfying her design, but sparing her the guilt of carrying it into execution. Shirley evidently bestowed unusual pains upon this tragedy. The parts are distributed with unwonted care; the dialogue is pregnant with purpose, rich, and spirited; and the powerful interest of the story never suffers interruption.

The last play of Shirley's that was produced upon the stage during his life, was the comedy of *The Sisters*, a bustling and diversified drama, varied by a number of well-contrasted characters and striking incidents, and burthened with an excellent moral. One of the sisters is proud and scornful, the other meek and virtuous; the pride of the one is humiliated and chastised by a marriage with the leader of a band of robbers, who passes himself off for a prince; while the retiring merits of the other are rewarded by the hand of the veritable prince. In the conduct of these scenes there is considerable vivacity, and some happy hits at female vanity. The date of the licence of *The Sisters* is 1642, the year in which theatrical rapresentations, after languishing for some time under neglect and persecution, were formally ordered to be suppressed by an act of parliament. The influence of puritanism, which was considerably strengthened by the sufferings of Prynne, whose excessive punishment was naturally regarded by his own party as martyrdom, had extended itself so completely over the

country, that there was no longer any safety for the stage. The actors, compelled to abandon the theatre, honourably embraced the cause of the king, and joined the army, in which they nearly all procured commissions. The only exception of note amongst them was Swanston*, who seceded from religious motives, but did not take an active part on either side. As nothing is known of the old actors at this time, Burbage, Hemmings, and Condell, it is to be presumed that they did not live to witness this desecration of the Muses; while Lowin, Taylor, and Pollard†, who came next to them in excellence, were past service, and forced to remain neutral. Robinson, who was a comedian of note, fell at the taking of a place, where he was surprised and overpowered by the notorious Harrison (who was afterwards hanged at Charing-cross); Robinson laid down his arms, and called for quarter; but Harrison shot him through the head, exclaiming at the same moment, "Cursed is he that doth the work of the Lord negligently:" — so blasphemously was Scripture drawn in to hallow the ferocities of the civil war. Mohun, who was brought up at the Blackfriars, became a captain, and when the strife was over in England, served in Flanders, where he received a majority. Allen, of the Cockpit, as we have already mentioned, obtained a majority, and was made quarter-master-general at Oxford. Hart, who used to act women's parts, was a lieutenant, under sir Thomas Dallison, in prince Rupert's regiment, in which troop Burt, who used also to play women's parts, was cornet, and Shatteral quarter-master. The calamities, however, to which the players were exposed

* This actor was celebrated in the character of Othello. When the war broke out, he took up the trade of a jeweller, and lived in Aldermanbury, within the territory of father Calamy.—*Historia Histrionica.*

† Lowin was the Falstaff, Morose, Volpone, and Mammon of his day; Taylor, the Hamlet, Iago, Truewit, and Face; and Pollard, a distinguished comedian. During the wars, Lowin and Taylor published the "Wild Goose Chace" of Beaumont and Fletcher, to help them through their poverty; and in his latter days, Lowin kept an inn, the Three Pigeons, at Brentford, where he died in distress, at a great age. Pollard, who lived single, had a competent estate in the country, to which, upon the closing of the theatres, he retired and died.

during this bitter interval, did not quench their zeal for their calling; and when the troubles were over, the few of them that survived gathered to London, and, says that excellent chronicler, Wright, for a subsistence endeavoured to revive their old trade privately. Making up a small company of the scattered members of several, they contrived to give some performances at the Cockpit; but the danger was so great that they were obliged to admit their audiences secretly, and to use the utmost caution as to the individuals they admitted. But the law still pursued them. In October, 1647, and February, 1648, ordinances were issued, prohibiting all plays and interludes; stages, seats, and galleries were ordered to be demolished; and players of every kind were proscribed as rogues and vagabonds. Nor did the penalty end here. The money received at the doors was ordered to be given to the poor, and each of the spectators was to pay five shillings for being present. Under such circumstances, considering the vigilance that was employed to carry the law into effect, it became impossible to escape detection. Wright's account of the disasters that befel them is full of interest. "They continued," he says, "undisturbed [at the Cockpit] for three or four days; but at last, as they were presenting the tragedy of *The Bloody Mother* (in which Lowin acted Aubrey; Taylor, Rollo; Pollard, the Cook; Burt, Latorch; and, I think, Hart, Otto)—a party of foot soldiers beset the house, surprised 'em about the middle of the play, and carried 'em away in their habits, not admitting them to shift, to Hatton House, then a prison, where, having detained them some time, they plundered them of their clothes, and let 'em loose again. Afterwards, in Oliver's time, they used to act privately, three or four miles out of town; now here, now there; sometimes in noblemen's houses, in particular Holland House, at Kensington*, where the nobility and gentry who met (but in no great numbers) used to make a sum for

* Holland House has always been a *refugium* for genius.

them, each giving a broad piece, or the like. And Alexander Goffe, the woman actor at Blackfryers (who had made himself known to persons of quality) used to be the jackall, and give notice of time and place. At Christmas, and Bartholomew Fair, they used to bribe the officer who commanded the guard at Whitehall, and were thereupon connived at to act for a few days at the Red Bull, but were sometimes, notwithstanding, disturbed by soldiers. Some picked up a little money by publishing the copies of plays never before printed, but kept up in manuscript." This last expedient, irreconcileable as it is to the spirit of the age, was adopted very generally amongst those who lived by the stage, Shirley along with the rest. Yet it is not easy to understand how the players, who, on the one hand, were so severely dealt with in the practice of their profession, were treated so leniently on the other, as to be permitted to publish what they were not allowed to act. How was it that the press was suffered to perpetuate, in another form, those dangerous delights which the rigorous censorship abolished in the temples of the Muses?

At the breaking out of the rebellion, Shirley, scared from his pleasant haunts in Salisbury-court and Drury-lane, was forced to leave London, along with his wife and children, of whom we have no further record, than that they shared his honourable poverty until the duke of Newcastle, forsaking England after the fatal battle of Marston Moor, in despair of rendering any further service to his royal master, invited the poet to share his fortunes with him abroad. Shirley then appears to have left his family behind him, who were afterwards, says Wood, "put to their shifts." We know not how long Shirley resided with the duke of Newcastle, who, being reduced to great privations himself, could hardly have maintained him for any great length of time. It is stated that Shirley assisted the duke in the composition of some of his plays, a fact which is not only rendered probable by the circumstances that thus threw them together, but which is confirmed by the insertion of a

song of Shirley's in a comedy of the duke's, for the detection of which we are indebted to Mr. Dyce.

A life of dependence, however, was not suited to the character of Shirley; and, least of all, this sort of dependence, upon a ruined patron, who could scarcely support himself and his wife. We find him, therefore, returning to London, as soon as the king's cause became hopeless, and establishing himself once more in his old avocation as a schoolmaster in the Whitefriars, where he was sustained by the friendship of Thomas Stanley, esq., an elegant and erudite writer, and other distinguished men. By this means he was enabled to obtain a comfortable and respectable livelihood. But he had also recourse to other means of subsistence. In 1646 he published a volume of poems of no great merit, and which seem to have been collected together merely for the sake of whatever profit might accrue from their sale. Some of these pieces are utterly unworthy of him, and but few rise to the height of the genius he developed in his dramas. He also wrote a preliminary address for a collection of MS. plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, which were published by the actors; and he continued from time to time to give a variety of compositions of various kinds to the press. One of these was a species of Latin Grammar in verse, a sort of freak of the schoolmaster's retired muse. In 1653 the most exquisite of his poems was printed, a masque called *Cupid and Death*, in which the allegory of Cupid and Death exchanging weapons is beautifully treated; and in 1659 a volume containing two dramatic compositions, that may fairly take rank amongst the least faultless of his productions,—*Honoria and Mammon*, and *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses for the Armour of Achilles.* This publication he announced as his last in the dramatic way, having resolved that nothing of that nature should again engage either his pen or invention. The latter piece was represented by "young gentlemen of quality, at a private entertainment of some persons of quality." In addition to these works, he published the *Rudiments*

of Grammar in English Verse, and *Manductio, or a leading of Children by the hand through the Principles of Grammar.* A translation of an Italian pastoral was also attributed to him, on account of the initials J. S. of the translator; but it was omitted from the last edition of his works, for want of better evidence. Langbaine states that Shirley left several plays in manuscript behind him, none of which have ever been recovered. Theobald published, in 1728, a tragi-comedy called *The Double Falsehood,* which Dr. Farmer conjectures to have been one of them; and Mr. Dyce was so far disposed to agree in that opinion, that, if the author's genuine text could have been procured, he states that he would have incorporated the play in his edition of Shirley. Theobald published *The Double Falsehood* as the work of Shakspeare; to whose spirit it bears about as much resemblance as one of Pye's court odes may be said to bear to an ode of Pindar.

A tragedy called *Andromane, or the Merchant's Daughter,* by J. S., founded on the story of Plangus in sir P. Sidney's *Arcadia,* was also attributed to Shirley, no doubt on account of the initials; but the last editor of Shirley's plays justly observes, that "it bears not the slightest resemblance, in diction, thought, or versification, to his acknowledged dramas."

Shirley lived to see the reformation, and to witness the successful revival of several of his plays; but there was no dramatic authors' protection law in existence then, and Shirley got nothing by the resuscitation of his works, beyond the gratification of a poet's ambition. He had determined never to tempt the scene again, and he kept his vow, although the appearance of three of Dryden's plays, before his death, might have been enough to seduce him once more into the theatre, to vindicate its ancient greatness. He ended life, as he began, in the humble and laborious occupation of a schoolmaster. His means appear to have been sufficient for his wants; but a fearful calamity was at hand, that suddenly drew his life to a melancholy conclusion. "After having lived

in various conditions," says Wood, "and having seen much of the world, he, with his second wife, Frances, were driven, by the dismal conflagration that happened in London in 1666, from their habitation near to Fleet-street, into the parish of St. Giles's in the Fields in Middlesex, where being in a manner overcome with affrightments, disconsolations, and other miseries occasioned by that fire and their losses, they both died within the compass of a natural day, whereupon their bodies were buried in one grave in the yard belonging to the said church of St. Giles's, on the 29th of October 1666." Thus, at the age of seventy-one, died James Shirley, in whom the fire of the early dramatic genius of England may be said to have expired.

We have dwelt at considerable length upon the productions of this dramatist, for several reasons; amongst others, because his works are not as generally known as they deserve to be, and because the only available or, indeed, intelligible edition we have of them—that with Gifford's annotations, edited by Mr. Dyce, is deficient in criticism, which the publication does not affect, but which was absolutely required to draw attention to the works of a poet who, for upwards of a century and a half, has been unjustly cast into obscurity by a single contemptuous allusion to him in the *Mac Flecknoe* of Dryden. Mr. Gifford's notes, which are few and scanty, are almost wholly occupied with passing elucidations of the text; and although the world is much indebted both to him and Mr. Dyce for the pains they took to render their edition accurate, the character of Shirley as a dramatist remained yet to be developed. Our notices of his plays may not supply the desideratum, but they will assist the reader to a fuller view of his works than can be procured through any other means except the perusal of the works themselves. Dryden effectually destroyed the popularity of Shirley; and it is no less extraordinary than lamentable that the venomous sting of a satirist should possess such a marvellous power over the judgment of the public. Shirley

held the stage successfully up to Dryden's time; several of his plays were revived after the restoration, and, as we have seen, reproduced at different intervals subsequently. The vast amount of his dramatic labours may be in part estimated by the fact, that he has bequeathed more plays to posterity than any of the early English dramatists; and there is reason for believing that he wrote many more, which have been lost. Yet this writer, who, if he possessed no higher claim than that which Lamb assigns him, of being "the last of a great race, all of whom spoke nearly the same language, and had a set of moral feelings and notions in common," would be entitled to an elevated place amongst the poets of his age,—this writer, so varied, so powerful, and so fruitful, was laid open to such ridicule by Dryden's scornful sarcasm, that every poetaster of the day considered him fair game for his petty doggrels, until at last, by the repeated force of these ignorant attacks, the name of Shirley was lost in a tradition which did dishonour to truth and poetry.

The invention of Shirley is abundantly testified by the ingenuity of his plots, which, with few exceptions, are all his own. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he derived little from histories or romances; hence his stories have an originality in them which, whatever may be their faults in other respects, gives them an internal freshness that cannot escape the reader. But while this was an advantage in some points of view, it was not entirely free from drawbacks. In his historical plays, for instance,—or rather, for none of them are, properly speaking, historical, in those plays which embrace the characters and titles of kings and princes,—we have nothing but the shadows of state; the individuals are purely imaginary, putting on the forms of known authority to give a false weight to their actions; there is nothing whatever exhibited to fix the locality, except the names; and if they were changed to any other names, the interest would remain precisely the same. There is nothing in these pieces to identify the scene—nothing

drawn from the history or customs of the land to give it the atmosphere of the place — no allusions to the laws, institutions, or condition of the people; they are mere fictions, like the pictures of those artists who first paint a head, and then call it after some great man of antiquity. In his English comedies alone, Shirley attempts to describe manners, and embody the fleeting traits of society; and there he succeeds admirably.

Of all our early dramatists, he puts forward the least pretension to the portraiture of individual character. His men and women are palpably alive before us; but it is a sort of coarse, common life, that does not seem to be susceptible of any fine shades of difference, and their natures are seldom sufficiently distinct from each other to exhibit various modifications of passion. They are generally thoroughly virtuous or thoroughly vicious — insincere, constant, capricious, revengeful, as the case may be; he seldom produces in a single person that mixture of qualities, that tempering of the predominant sentiment, which we meet in the world; and hence it frequently happens, that when he finds it necessary for the ends of the drama to convert a profligate, or to turn off the affections of a lover into a new channel, or to effect any other change in the direction of the interest, the transition is so abrupt, in the want of those balancing points which would prepare us for the fickleness of the scene, as to appear unnatural. But Shirley depended more upon the dexterity of his plots than upon the completeness or probability of his characters: and upon this head the modern stage is largely his debtor. He displays consummate tact in the management of his fables; an intimate knowledge of the resources of the art, and the expedients of the theatre, is exhibited in his comedies, which, for vivacity, skill in construction, artful equivoque, and brilliant surprises, have never been equalled by any of his successors. His plays of this kind have been imitated in a variety of shapes, and almost all their sweets rifled without acknowledgment. But, although his forte did not lie in the delineation of the

individual, he has produced some characters of intense power, which stand out upon the canvass in the just and visible proportions of life. He penetrated the passions to their inmost retreats, but did not seem to be aware that that passion must fail to move us deeply which is not shown in its influence upon a particular nature; otherwise it is a description, not a delineation, of passion. Jealousy, for example, might be described in a multitude of ways, and yet be vague enough after all; but when the action of jealousy is shown to us upon a nature so generous, confiding, and noble as that of *Othello*, we see it in a light which reveals it in living reality, and stirs the blood within us like something that immediately affects ourselves.

There is a constant desire in Shirley to subserve the interests of morality. His plays, occasionally even at some expense of probability, have usually a moral flowering out of their vicissitudes. The worst of his rakes contrives to snatch a grace of good feeling, to redeem himself, before the play is over; for Shirley rarely makes vice immitigable, or beyond the reach of repentance. Considering the licentiousness of the age in which he wrote, it may be accorded to him that he was "comparatively chaste;" but it must be admitted, at the same time, that there runs through his plays a deeper vein of the mere animal nature — as if he had a low appreciation of the intellectual part of man — than is to be found in the plays of any of his contemporaries. His plots turn constantly upon intrigues, as if the thoughts of people of all degrees were perpetually running on the grossest enjoyments. His husbands and lovers, lords and clowns, when an opportunity offers, never fail to spring a chase of this kind; they seem as if they were in an immedicable heat, and their whole business was to appease it. This is the grand fault of his plays; there is a *fleshiness* in them, if we may so express it, that does not offend so much in expression as in the general effect. The truth is, that Shirley was deficient in imagination; he had a vigorous grasp of the elements of nature, but

lacked the faculty of refining them for his purpose. An opulent fancy, uncontrolled by a superintending taste, frequently led him to overlay his lines with rich images, that pressed heavily upon them. His incidental lyrics are cumbrous; and his poems are generally wanting in grace and delicacy. But, notwithstanding these deductions, his plays abound with passages of exquisite beauty and tenderness. Singularly unequal in spirit and execution, they contain numerous scenes of the purest poetry and most touching pathos. His diction is masculine, energetic, and exuberant; and the knowledge which he every where displays of the human heart, inspires his productions with a pervading charm, that is likely to live as long as the language in which he wrote

WILLIAM DAVENANT.

(1605—1666.)

THE STAGE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

SIR WILLIAM DAVENANT was so intimately mixed up with the affairs of the theatre, that a memoir of his life properly resolves itself into a history of the stage during the period in which he lived. And what an eventful period was that, not only in the fortunes of the drama, but of the country itself! Davenant was born in 1605, and died in 1666; and during that interval England, politically and morally, underwent two distinct revolutions. From the fourth year of James I. to the ninth of Charles II., every thing was changed; the morals, the manners, the literature, and more especially, the drama. If the representation of lord Sackville's *Gorboduc**, in 1561, may be considered the birthday of the native drama, properly so called, it may be said to have attained its maturity within the ordinary period of human life, when, in 1605, *King Lear* was produced; and to have fulfilled the analogy in 1648, when it came by a violent death at the hands of the puritans: thus reaching to a ripe old age of eighty-seven years. Its maturity, death, and resuscitation, come within the period embraced in the life of Davenant.

In treating of this period, we shall find it necessary

* *Gorboduc*, as well as *Lear*, was represented at Whitehall; the former on the 18th of January, 1561; the latter on the 21st of December (St. Stephen's day) 1605. There was no fair ground, therefore, for the peevish remark of Pepys in 1665: "This night," says he (April 20), "I am told the first play is played in Whitehall, which is now turned to a house of playing" But he alluded to the new building, the banquetting house; which, however, had been devoted to worse purposes during the interregnum, and which is now converted into an elegant chapel.

to touch, here and there, upon some particulars that have been already incidentally alluded to in previous biographies in this series, but which are essential to the completeness of this; which must be considered as a memoir of the stage, as well as of the individual dramatist.

Two years before the birth of Davenant, king James had granted a license, under the privy seal, to Shakspeare, Fletcher, Burbage, Heminge, Condel, and others, authorising them to act at their own house, the Globe on Bankside, and in any other part of the kingdom, during his majesty's pleasure. Previously to that time, the stage had become not a little licentious; and we find, in the controversial works of Gosson against the stage, in 1579, more sound argument than in the replies of Lodge and Heywood who wrote in its defence. Now, however, under royal patronage, and directed by William Shakspeare and his associates, dramatic literature ranked with the highest efforts of the muse; and the stage became what Terence would have had it, *schola morum ac speculum vitæ*. In courts and castles, masques were presented by the nobility themselves on great occasions, while "the well-trod stage" was one of the chief delights of every-day life among the wits in town, and their imitators in the provinces. London boasted seventeen theatres, to say nothing of the performances at Whitehall; and that "cirey of young eyases," the children actors, who were so much the fashion, that the "tragedians of the city" were compelled "to travel," to the loss of their "reputation and profit." To this circumstance, and to these youthful rivals, concerning whom the nation "held it no sin to *tar* on poet and player to the controversy," was probably owing the temporary stay of Shakspeare at Oxford, in the early years of king James's accession. It will be remembered that in town the players lived together, either in the houses of their masters, or in some house of their own, under the patronage and protection of their lord; but it appears to have been otherwise in the country, and at Oxford we learn that Shakspeare, while on a professional re-

sidence in that city, became an inmate of the tavern, afterwards (in Anthony Wood's time) called the Crown, in St. Martin's parish, kept by Mr. John Davenant, a substantial vintner, and respectable citizen, who, in the year 1601, had been raised to the dignity of mayor of Oxford. "Mine host" was of a taciturn and severe disposition; of sanguine temperament, dark complexion, and remarkably grave and dull; "of a very melancholic disposition," so that he was scarce ever seen to laugh: but the hostess was one of the handsomest women in Oxford; of light and agreeable manners, a very happy disposition, and great wit. It was, therefore, no very extraordinary circumstance that this accomplished lady and her unequalled guest should become very intimate friends; or that William Shakspeare should have been the godfather of William Davenant; nor, considering the character of the period, the circumstances of the parties, a supposed resemblance between Davenant and Shakspeare, and the lively brilliant character of the child, who appears to have inherited the mind and qualities of his mother, rather than of his father, is it surprising that the tongue of scandal should have imputed to Davenant a nearer relationship to Shakspeare than that of godchild. We do not feel called upon to champion the virtue of Mrs. Davenant, nor to remove from her son that taint of blood which it is supposed he himself considered as an honour; but we see nothing in the facts of the case to justify the scandal, nor any thing in the after-bearing of our ubject to forbid the belief that he was the son of John Davenant, the vintner of Oxford.

That Shakspeare's visits to the university were professional has been disputed; but there are some strong probabilities in favour of the supposition. The scene in Hamlet, to which we have already alluded, seems expressly written to defend the players from any diminution either in profit or reputation, because of their travelling. Two causes appear to have operated upon the "Tragedians of the City" to justify their pro-

vincial tours: first and partially, the great number of theatres then open in London; and, secondly and chiefly, the fashionable mania for the performance of young children, the children of St. Paul's and the children of the Revels,—the former the regular successors of the clergy in the performance of the mysteries,—the latter the successors of the clerks of London in the personation of moralities, &c. Malone supposed *Hamlet* to have been written in 1596, in which case it is probable that the scene alluded to was introduced afterwards, levelling, as it evidently does, at the children actors, who, like a nest of young hawks, "cry'd out on the top of question, and were most tyrannically clapped for 't." "These are now the fashion," says Rosentcrantz, "and so berattle the common stages (so they call them), that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills, and dare scarce come thither." "Do the boys carry it away," asks Hamlet; "Aye, that they do, my lord," is the reply. Hercules and his Load, too, an evident allusion to the Globe theatre by a characteristic mistake of Atlas for Hercules; and perhaps also to the Bull, another theatre, and a well-known load of Hercules. In consequence of this innovation, probably, and inasmuch as the patent from king James permitted them to perform in any part of the kingdom, the company of Burbage, Shakspeare, and others, travelled to several provincial towns and cities; and hence, perhaps, the remarkable accuracy of several local descriptions in Shakspeare's plays. It was not till 1606 that *Macbeth* was written; and it is not at all improbable, considering the interest that then attached to Scotland, that the great poet and his companions visited Perth and its neighbourhood, to which so many allusions are made in the course of this play. It is at least certain, that the English cities, among which was Oxford, entertained, and were entertained by, the "Tragedians of the City." To these circumstances was owing the connection, real and supposed, of the subject of this memoir with the immortal Shakspeare.

To keep a "pack" of hounds and a "cry" of players were among the privileges of the nobility, although few of the order were wealthy enough to maintain them. Travelling companies, therefore, were by no means uncommon. They had the licence and wore the livery of their master, as of lord Strange and others; and performed at the houses of the less fortunate nobility and at the different towns. Their reputation, profit, and performances were, doubtless, much beneath those of the metropolitan companies, and, indeed, they were often suppressed on account of licentiousness and on other grounds of complaint. A third class of players were forbidden by law: they were the strollers and minstrels who pretended to possess a prescription from some great lord, without any authority. They were denounced as vagrants and vagabonds, and punished accordingly; and this not only in defence of public morals, but because of the indignity offered to the nobleman to whose patronage they pretended, and their illegal interference with the gains of the licensed players. In 1661, John Dutton of Dutton, in Cheshire, esq., claimed by prescription the right of licensing minstrels, &c., and his claim was allowed. The trumpet licence for the exhibition of monsters, shows, and minstrels, &c., in booths at fairs, is still in force, and is doubtless a remain of this prescriptive right.

Among the dramatic authors who flourished when Davenant was born, was Shakspeare, who that year wrote his *King Lear;* Ben Jonson, whose *Volpone*, and the queen's masque of *Blackheath*, were acted in 1605; Beaumont and Fletcher, whose *Woman Hater* appeared in 1607; William, earl of Sterling, whose *Alexandrian* tragedy appeared in 1605; William Alabaster, the friend of Nicholas Bacon, and author of *Roxana;* Anthony Brewer, the probable author of *Lingua*, played in 1607; [in which, as there is some reason to believe, Oliver Cromwell took a part when it was afterwards acted at Cambridge]; lady Elizabeth Cary, who

wrote her *Marian, the Fair Queen of Jersey*, some years after; George Chapman, whose *All Fools* and *Eastward Hoe!* were produced in 1605; John Cooke, author of *Green's "Tu Quoque;"* Samuel Daniel, whose *Philotas* appeared in 1605, [and who was poet-laureate after Spencer and before Ben Jonson]; Mary Davys, whose *Isle of Gulls* was acted in 1606; Dekker, whose *Satiro-Mastix* (levelled at Ben Jonson), was played in 1606, and his *Westward Hoe!* in 1607; Drayton, whose *Two Harpies* appeared in 1602; Nathaniel Field, author of the *Fatal Dowry;* Phineas Fletcher, who was then at College; John Forde, who had just at that time entered of the Temple; Doctor Gager, author of *Meleager*, &c. (who was then disputing publicly, and maintaining his thesis that it was lawful for husbands to beat their wives); Goffe, author of the *Careless Shepherdess*, then at college; sir Fulke Greville (lord Brooke), author of *Mustapha*, &c.; Dr. Hackett, whose religious zeal and loyalty were no less celebrated than his dramatic talent; Richard Hathwaye [any relation of Shakspeare's wife, Anne Hathway?] whose *Patient Grissel* appeared in 1603; Hemminge, the son of Shakspeare's colleague, and a voluminous play writer; Heylin, author of *Theomachia;* Matthew Heywood, (the apolegetic Atlas of the stage), several of whose plays were produced about 1605; Dr. Holiday; Charles Hoole, the translator of *Terence;* James Howell, (the historiographer), author of *Peleus and Thetis;* sir W. Killigrew, who was born in the same year with Davenant; Kit Marlow, whose *Faustus* was produced in 1604; Marston, whose *Dutch Courtezan* was played in 1605; Massey, whose *Siege of Dunkirk* appeared in 1602; Philip Massinger, who had just attained his twenty-second year; May, Davenant's rival for the laurel in 1637, and a writer of plays; the eccentric Dr. Mayne; Thomas Middleton, whose best plays were produced between 1602 and 1608; Milton, the great contemporary and advocate of Davenant, was born some three years later; the Abbé Montagne; Antony Munday, whose *Widow's Chair* and *City Pageants* were in vogue in 1605; Nicolls, author of the

Twynnes' Tragedie; Quarles, author of the *Virgin Widow,* as well as the *Deathless Emblems*; George Ruggle, author of *Club Law, Ignoramus,* &c.; Sackville, lord Buckhurst, who died while Davenant was a child; H. Serfe and William Sampson, both of whom were then living, and perhaps preparing the plays they afterwards produced; John Saville, who wrote *King James's Entertainment at Theobald's;* Edward Sharpham, who wrote the *Fleire;* Robert Shaw, author of the *Four Sons of Amon;* James Shirley, who, though he had not yet produced any of his many plays, was living; William Smith (probably Rouge Dragon), whose *Hector of Germanie* was published when Davenant was ten years old; Speed, the son of the chronicler, who was with Davenant at college; John Stephen, author of *Cynthia's Revenge;* Dr. W. Strode, who wrote the *Floating Island;* sir John Suckling was born eight years after Davenant; Robert Tailor, whose *Hog hath lost his Pearl* was reprinted in 1614; Tomkis, of whom little more is known than his *Albumazor,* acted about this time, and printed some years after; Cyril Tourneur, whose *Revenger's Tragedy* was acted in 1607; John Webster, whose *White Devil* was printed in 1612; George Wilkins, whose *Miseries of enforced Marriage* appeared in 1607; Robert Wilson, who in his many plays was assisted by Chettle, Munday, Drayton, Dekker, Hathwaye, &c., and who lived only till Davenant was ten years old; sir Henry Wotton; and Robert Yamington, author of two *lamentable tragedies.*

Thus numerous were the dramatic authors at this period, and as it marks an epoch in the history of the stage, we thought it would be useful to render the list as full as possible, the names it contains being more or less connected with the history, not only of Davenant, but of the seventeenth century. It may be no less agreeable to meet with as full an account as we can render of the stages on which these dramas were produced, and of the persons engaged in their presentation, especially as these details are illustrative of the manners and amusements of the period.

The Globe theatre was situated on the Bankside, on the Surrey side of the water, and nearly opposite to the end of Friday-street; its site is marked by a small court, called the Bear-garden, for immediately behind the Globe theatre rose the rival place of amusement, the Bear-pit; which in Hollar's View of old London, 1647, is represented as superior in size and dignity to the theatre. The Globe, as therein figured, appears a circular building, roofless in the centre, but, with the galleries, &c., covered by an inclined thatched roof. A flag is hoisted to signify to the public that the play had commenced. Within this wooden O, as Shakspeare himself admirably describes it, were produced the greater portion of that splendid series of plays which have immortalized their author, and conferred an honour on his country. The first fixed theatre on this site may be dated about 1596; for previously to that period inn-yards were reckoned sufficiently commodious; and, indeed, their areas and galleries were probably imitated in the Globe and other theatres of that time. On St. Peter's day, the 29th of June, 1613, during a representation of Shakspeare's Henry VIII., this "glory of the Bank" was burned to the ground. Sir Henry Wootton, in his correspondence under this date, describes the circumstance. "The king's players," he says, "had a new play, called '*All is True*,' representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry VIII., which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage: the knights of the order with their Georges and garter; the guards with their embroidered coats, and the like; sufficient in truth, within a while, to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now, king Henry making a masque at the cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the stuff did light on the thatch, where, being thought at first but an idle smoke, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming, within an hour, the whole house to the very ground. This was the fatal

period of that *virtuous* fabric." The sneer with which this is related shows the coming puritanism of the writer. The cannons were, as we are otherwise told, "a peal of chambers," and chambers were a species of fire-work, intended to imitate the discharge of ordnance. The theatrical season at the *Globe* was summer, and the performances always took place in the day-time. The house was soon after repaired, and became a model for the other theatres. In 1623, when Middleton's *Game of Chess* was produced here, the receipts were 1,500*l.* for the first nine nights. The charge of admission being, for a seat on the stage 1*s.*, and for the groundlings 6*d.* each person; the rate of admission to the galleries or scaffolds probably varying from 1*s.* to 6*d.*, according to the position, the "best rooms" being in front of, and nearly opposite to, the stage. This very successful play owed some of its attraction to a political feeling, for it was suppressed after the nine nights' run, the actors (great as were the company at the Globe in influence and authority) reproved, and the author imprisoned at the suit of Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador.

The Rose theatre was also situated on the Bank, and on the same (the Surrey) side of the water with the Globe. Here the lord admiral's servants acted from 1590 to 1602. In 1592, the players, under the protection of Ferdinand lord Strange, produced, at this theatre, *The First Part of Henry VI.*, which was acted with success for thirteen days in fifteen weeks. Alleyn acted Talbot so admirably, as to draw praises even from the satirist Nash, who, in the same year, writes, "How would it have joyed brave Talbot, the terror of the French, to think that, after he had been 200 years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at different times), who, in the tragedian Alleyn, that represents his person, beheld him fresh bleeding." The earl of Nottingham, when lord high-admiral, gave his name to the company at the Rose, who were called the right honourable Thomas earl of Nottingham his play-

ers. In 1593, they were the servants of the earl of Sussex. In 1599, the earl of Derby's men acted here again; and up to 1631, we find the same family's servants, under the title of lord Strange's men, performing at the Rose and other theatres.

The Hope theatre stood on the same side of the river: the earl of Worcester's servants acted there in 1602; and we have a play which was produced here in 1614.

The Swan theatre was also on the Bankside. In 1597 the earl of Pembroke's servants (of whom was Shakspeare) acted at the Swan: in 1601, the earl of Oxenford's men played here: and in 1630, the servants of the lady Elizabeth performed at the Swan on the Bankside. In the order of the privy council, dated 1600, and licensing the Fortune theatre, it is said,— "And for the other house to be allowed on the Surrey side, whereas their lordships are pleased to permit to the company of players that shall play there (of whom Shakspeare was one), to make their own choice *of divers houses that are there*, choosing one of them, and no more; and the said company of players, being the servants of the lord chamberlain (Hunsdon), have made choice of the house called the Globe," &c. The Globe, the Rose, the Hope, and the Swan, were the divers houses here alluded to.

The Fortune theatre was situated near the Bankside also, but on the Middlesex side, in Golding Lane, Cripplegate, or between that and Whitecross-street. It was built in 1600 by Edward Alleyn, a servant of the lord admiral, instead of another (the Curtain), which was then pulled down. This was one of the theatres especially alluded to in the order of the privy council, issued on the 22d June, 1600 (the court being then at Greenwich), to restrain the excesses of the stage. The actors at this theatre, and those at the Globe, were permitted to act "twice a week, and no oftener," and "especially," says the order, "they shall refrain to play on the sabbath-day." The Fortune may be regarded as the first regular theatre in the city. It was built on the model

of the Globe (Shakspeare's) theatre, and cost, in its erection, the sum of 1,320*l*. The Fortune being licensed by the above cited order in council, while in an unfinished state, was opened on the 25th of July in the same year, that is, about a month after the date of the order. The earl of Nottingham's servants were the first actors at the Fortune. Edward Alleyn, its original proprietor, was the truly benevolent founder of "The College of Godde's Gyft," at Dulwich. He retired from the stage in 1617; in 1619 he became his own pensioner as master of the college; in 1620 (May 26), "My wife and I," we quote his own memorial, "acknowledged the fine, at the common pleas bar, of all our lands to the college; blessed be God that he has given us life to do it." The Fortune theatre was destroyed by fire on Sunday, December 11, 1621; but, in 1623, was rebuilt, or, as it is written, "arose again more fair," and continued to be used till 1632.

The Curtain Theatre. — The name describes the locality of this ancient place of amusement. Its first site was in the Curtain-road, and here we have no knowledge of any original play being produced. It was to be pulled down in 1600, in obedience to the order of council, and the Fortune theatre licensed in its stead; but as we have plays produced at the Curtain theatre in 1607, 1610, and 1623, we must suppose, either that it escaped the fate designed for it, or that a new Curtain theatre arose (as is most probable) in the district of Shoreditch, which for its sign hung out a striped curtain, which has been absurdly taken as the origin of the name.

The Red Bull. — There appear to have been two theatres so called. In 1611, and from that date to 1623, we find a long series of plays produced at the Red Bull in Bishopsgate; and in 1638, 1656, and for six or seven years after the latter date, the Red Bull appears to signify a theatre erected in the Red Bull yard, at the upper end of St. John's-street, Clerkenwell. In Robert Cox's *Humours and Drolleries*, printed in 1662, is an

engraving, supposed to represent the interior of the Red Bull, according to which, the auditory appear to have entirely surrounded the stage. No side scenes were used and the actors came out, in their turn, from the back of a curtain, behind which they disappeared when it was necessary to make their exit. This "arras" seems to have served all the purposes of our scenes. It was black for tragedy, and of gay colours for comedy; and the locale of the scene was generally written on a board attached to this curtain. The imagination was thus allowed its full play, and the powers of the mind were suffered to fix on the poetry and on the acting, undisturbed by the contending claims of the painter and the mechanist. How fully Shakspeare felt this is attested by the opening chorus to Henry V.: —

> "But pardon, gentles all,
> The flat unraised spirit, that hath dar'd
> On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
> So g . . s an object:"
>
> "O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
> Attest, in little place, a million;
> And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
> On your imaginary forces work:"
>
> "Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;"
>
> 'For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
> Carry them," &c.

Again, in the second chorus, —

> "And the scene
> Is now transported, gentles, to Southampton:
> There is the playhouse now, there must you sit:
> And thence to France shall we convey you safe
> And bring you back, charming the narrow seas
> To give you gentle pass," &c.

In the third chorus, —

> "Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege."
>
> "Still, be kind,
> And eke out our performance with your mind."

In the fourth chorus,—

> "And so our scene must to the battle fly:
> Where, (O for pity!) we shall much disgrace —
> With four or five most vile and ragged foils,
> Right ill-dispos'd, in brawl ridiculous, —
> The name of Agincourt. yet, sit and see;
> Minding true things, by what their mockeries be."

We doubt whether the finest scenery and hosts of supernumeraries could so impress with any sense of the reality a capable audience as this most admirable confession of weakness, which the very confession converts to strength. If such were the deficiencies of the first theatre in London, we need not turn to the *Midsummer Night's Dream* to conceive what were the difficulties, and what the shifts to overcome them, which the inferior players had to encounter. In 1620, "the late queen's servants" acted, at the Red Bull. It was at the Red Bull, according to Pepys, that Tom Killigrew, when he wanted to see a play, used to hang about the doors until invited to be a devil; "then he would go in, and be a devil upon the stage."

The *Nursery Theatre* stood in Hatton Garden. Here, in 1640, was produced the *Constant Maid* of Shirley; in the first edition of which, printed in 1667, this theatre is described as the "new playhouse, called the Nursery, in Hatton Garden."

The theatre in *Black Friars*. Here the earl of Worcester's servants acted in 1601. In 1605 the children of the revels, or of her majesty's revels, who in 1609 are called the children of Blackfriars, were the company of this theatre. Plays were produced at the House in Blackfriars almost constantly till 1662, except when interdicted by authority, as in 1653, when Shirley's *Court Secret* was prepared for this theatre; but its representation was forbidden, and the players inhibited to perform. The public theatre was called, we believe, the Globe in Blackfriars, in emulation of the Globe on the opposite side of the water; but there was also the pri-

vate house in the Black Friars, a *domus scenica:* this appears to have been a loft, or large upper apartment, in some building attached to the house of lord Hunsdon, in the Black Friars, near the public theatre, the locality of which is still preserved in the name, Playhouse Yard. In this place plays were acted by the children of Blackfriars, by the children, or company of of the revels, by the children of her majesty's, or his majesty's revels, as the case might be, during a long series of years. The house was lent to the French ambassador; in 1623, the playhouse portion of it was converted into a catholic chapel; and in that year fell, during sermon time on Sunday, November 5 (new style), and eighty-one persons were slain by the fall. This private house, or theatre, was the "eirey of young eyases" alluded to by Hamlet; here they were reared, and here fulfilled Shakspeare's prophecy, by continuing their trade of acting after they became men. Master Edwards, sir J. Astley, Ben Jonson, sir H. Herbert, and others, in the capacity of master of the royal revels, had the superintendence of this company, and, apparently, of both houses in the Blackfriars.

There were two theatres in White Friars also: one at Salisbury-house in Salisbury-court, at the end of Salisbury-street, Fleet-street. It was called the *Phœnix,* and the private house in Salisbury-court. Here the children of the revels acted in 1640; but with this and other interruptions the queen's company occupied this theatre from 1612 to 1665. The other theatre was situated in Dorset Gardens, Fleet-street. It was called, for a time, the *Queen's Theatre,* and, at other times, the *Duke of York's Theatre.* It flourished from 1669 to 1696. It was a new and splendid building in November 1671. *The Cornish Comedy* was acted here while Rich was manager; and *The Tempest,* as altered by Dryden and sir W. Davenant, was given at Dorset Gardens. The probability is, that as Dorset Gardens is actually a part of Salisbury-court, that the same site served for both theatres. It was on this site that

Davenant built his splendid Theatre for Duke of York's company, which was not finished at his death.

Gibbon's Tennis-court, Vere-street, Clare-market.—Here was erected a temporary theatre, wherein plays were acted, until a new theatre was built on its site, which received the name of The New Theatre, near Lincoln's Inn Fields. "We are not quite sure, whether the old Lincoln's Inn Theatre, "where the women acted for themselves," was this, or another theatre; but we are inclined to think, that the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and The New Theatre in Little Lincoln's Inn Fields, or near Lincoln's Inn, were two distinct buildings. Pepys visited The New Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields on the 3d January, 1661; and, for the first time, saw women appear on the stage. The play he saw was Beaumont and Fletcher's *Beggar's Bush.* Plays were produced here from 1696 to 1760. The New Theatre in Portugal-row could hardly be the same with that built on the site of Gibbon's Tennis-court, and occupied by the king's company. It was called The Duke of York's Theatre only while Davenant occupied it, after having rebuilt it in 1662; from this place he removed to Dorset Gardens.

The *Cockpit*, in Drury-lane, was perhaps the first theatre opened to the public, on the west side of Temple Bar. The Phœnix, Drury-lane, and the Private House, Drury-lane, are, probably, only other names for the same place. We find it first noticed in 1624, and under the names already quoted, or as the Duke's Theatre, the Duke of York's Theatre, or the Theatre Royal in Drury-lane, it continued until the building of a larger and more elegant theatre there, about the year 1784. At this theatre the performances were repeated every day at three o'clock in the afternoon precisely; this was in the interdicted period in the year 1648. But while the houses were called private, the performances were in the evening, and the auditory was more select than at the public theatres.

There was no regular theatre in the Haymarket till

1705; the little theatre in that street did not rise till 1720. The Covent Garden Theatre does not date farther back than 1733. There was a Patagonian theatre in 1793, at Exeter Change; but these are not of our period. The queen saw a play at Somerset House in 1654. In 1633, and in 1740, there were plays at the Tennis-court, St. James's; and, as we have already noticed, the Banquetting House at Whitehall was used as a court theatre. Pepys, in 1666, has this entry in his journal, for October 29. "Into the new playhouse there (Whitehall) the first time I ever was there, and the first play I have seen since before the great plague; the play being *Love in a Tub*, a silly play, and the whole thing done ill."

Such was the stage in London, from a few years before the birth of Davenant until his death.

With regard to the players themselves, we have seen that, when the priests laid down this attractive part of their profession, the "children of Paul's," and the "clerks of London" took it up. The taste increasing, public players acted in the courtyards of inns and taverns, which were covered in for the occasion, in tennis courts, and other open places. As their plays ceased to be religious, they became politically scurrilous, or offensively profane, or openly indecent, till the plays were forbidden, and the players restricted to allowed performances, in fixed places, and at certain times. This was done by the grave council of Elizabeth, who called to account the Surrey and Middlesex magistrates, for permitting plays and players to exceed the bounds of decency in action, and encourage profaneness and political scandal in their words.

Before the stage became a profession, plays were indispensable on great occasions. They were acted at the universities, and the most ripe and reverend scholars aided in their production, either as authors, actors, or auditors. At the Charter House, at Christ's Hospital, at Merchant Tailors, and at all the public schools, plays were, as they are still, produced oc-

casionally as academical exercises, and for the improvement of youth in moral maxims, and in knowledge of the world. At St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey, the Royal Chapel, and St. George's, Windsor, the choristers gave plays. On solemn occasions too, the faculties, especially that of law, produced their plays, and innumerable are the masques and expensive entertainments of dramatic character which owe their production to the sergeants-at-law, the templars, and other gentlemen of the inns of court, who were accustomed to act in these exhibitions, and appear to have taken the greatest pride in them. At court the king and his lords, or the queen and her ladies of honour, took their parts in masques, or spectacles, on every great occasion. The visit of a foreign prince, or ambassador extraordinary, an alliance, a peace, a marriage, or a birthday, were celebrated at court in the dramatic form.

At Christmas, Easter, and other church festivals, a play was an indispensable part of the revels. The king and his lords, all of whom are named in the *dramatis personæ*, performed a masque at court on the same day after Twelfth Night, 1631. The queen and eleven of her ladies of honour took part in a masque at Hampton Court on that day in 1604; and the queen and her ladies presented a play at Shrovetide in the year 1630. It was so in all the courts of Europe; and we have a play acted by the king of France, with the aid of the lords of his privy council, in the beginning of the 18th century. At Whitehall, at Westminster, at St. James's, at Hampton Court, at Richmond, at Woodstock (while the palace existed), at Newmarket, at Somerset House, and wheresoever the court might be, there were players either noble amateurs or servants of the king, the queen, or princes. Queen Elizabeth in 1583, at the request of sir Francis Walsingham*, established some dozen of

* It is rather remarkable that Stephen Gosson should have dedicated to sir Francis Walsingham his *Plays confuted in Five Actions*, proving that they are not to be suffered in a christian commonwealth; but again in 1579 he dedicated to sir Philip Sydney his "Pleasaunt Invective against

players at Barn Elms, granting them wages and liveries as grooms of the royal chamber. Of this corps was Tarleton, the famous clown, whose power over the queen was so great that her most trusted courtiers were fain to solicit his aid to "undumpish" her majesty when offended with her councillors. On the 18th of May in the same year, 1574, she issued her royal license for the performance of plays to the men of the earl of Leicester, which document we quote verbatim, as indispensable in a work of this nature.* This license was not affected by the order in council of 1600, for we know that the players who remained of the earl of Leicester's company were incorporated in that of the lord chamberlain, (Hunsdon), which with the lord admiral's company, were licensed and directed in this order of council. Edward Alleyn was then a servant of the lord admiral, and William Shakspeare a servant of the lord chamberlain. At the end of twenty-nine years in 1603, the first year of James I., a license was granted under the

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Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, and such like Caterpillars of the Commonwealth."

* ELIZABETH'S LICENSE, 10th May, 1574.

Elizabeth, by the grace of God, queen of England, to all justices, mayors, sheriffs, bailiffs, head constables, under constables, and all other our officers and ministers greeting. Know ye that we of our special grace, certain knowledge, and mere motion, have licensed and authorised, and by these presents do license and authorize our loving subjects, *James Burbage, John Perkyn, John Lanham, William Johnson, and Robert Wilson, servants to our trusty and well-beloved cousin and counsellor, the earl of Leicester*, to use, exercise, and occupy the art and faculty of playing comedies, tragedies, interludes, stage-plays, and such other like as they have already used and studied, or hereafter shall use and study, *as well for the recreation of our loving subjects, as for our solace and pleasure when we shall think good to see them*; as also to use and occupy all such instruments as they have already practised, or hereafter shall practise, for and during our pleasure; and the said comedies, tragedies, interludes, and stage-plays, together with the music, to show, publish, exercise, and occupy to their best commodity, during all the term aforesaid, as well within the liberties and freedoms of any of our cities, towns, boroughs, &c. whatsoever, as without the same throughout our realm of England. Willing and commanding you, and every of you, as ye tender our pleasure, to permit and suffer them herein without any lets, hindrance, or molestation during the time aforesaid, any act, statute, or proclamation, or commandment heretofore made, or hereafter to be made, notwithstanding; provided that the said comedies, tragedies, interludes, and stage-plays be *by the master of our revels for the time being, before seen and allowed*; and that the same be not published or shown *in the time of common prayer*, or in the time of great and common plague in our said city of London.

privy seal to Shakspeare, Fletcher, Burbage, Heminge, Condell, and others, authorising them to act, not only at their usual house, the Globe, on the Bankside, but in any other part of the kingdom during his majesty's pleasure.

Although, however, the stage was thus recognised as a distinct profession, yet the amateur performances continued among the royal and the noble. The city had its laureate as well as the court; and the grave citizens gave and enjoyed their pageants. After the example of the crown, the great nobility had their players, and enjoyed their performances when they thought proper; granting them protection license, and in some cases, livery and allowance, but in others, merely badges or patents, to secure them from the petty authority of the local magistracy, during such time as they were not wanted to perform before their lords.*

The lord admiral for the time being, whether lord Howard, or the earl of Nottingham, or other noblemen, and the lord chamberlain, the earl of Hunsdon, and the earl of Sussex, &c. appear to have had players in right of their office. The earl of Derby, who died in 1537, had players as well as his son, the earl of Derby, and *his* son lord Strange, so that this company may be traced from 1530 to 1631, upwards of 100 years. The earl Walter of Essex, the earl of Sussex, the earl of Pembroke, the earl of Warwick, the earl of Worcester, the earl of Lincoln, the lord Berkeley, the earl of Ox-

* In Mount Tabor, or private exercises of a penitential sinner, published in 1639, we find an illustration of the manner in which the players were received in the provincial towns during the 16th century: "In the city of Gloucester," says this writer, "the manner is (as I think it is in other like corporations), that when the players of interludes come to town, they first attend the mayor, to inform him what nobleman's servants they are, and so get license for their public playing; and if the mayor like the actors, *or would show respect to their lord and master*, he appoints them to play their first play before himself and the alderman and common council of the city; and that it is called the mayor's play, where every one that will comes in without money; the mayor giving the players a reward as he thinks fit, to show respect unto them." This curious relation is quoted at length in Barker's *Biographia Dramatica*; and the writer declares that he retained in manhood a strong impression of the moral of an interlude, he had seen acted before the mayor of Gloucester, about the year 1572; and he refers to it with satisfaction in a religious work published in his seventy-fifth year.

ford, the earl of Stafford, baron Chandos of Dudley, sir Robert Lane, and other noblemen and gentlemen, are known to have retained each a company of players, who were almost contemporary.

It was this general diffusion of a taste for dramatic entertainments, as well as this practical acquaintance with the nature and difficulties of stage representation, that carried the art of acting to the height which we have reason to believe it then attained, which raised the stage from the booth to the palace, and which perfected, to the last degree, that species of composition, which must remain the ornament of our literature. Few audiences could have been assembled in those days of whom the greater part had not practically acquainted themselves with the beauties of dramatic poetry and the art of its delivery : nothing very unlike nature could be tolerated; and there was critical judgment enough in all but "the groundlings" to appreciate the efforts of an artist, who had sufficient enthusiasm to throw himself into his character, talent to give it verisimilitude, and judgment to keep his art within "the modesty of nature." It has been justly said, that "plays are always written with reference to the histrionic genius of the times; and if actors are not at hand, in whose sympathy and sense of excellence the dramatist can feel confidence, talent will run into other channels, and the stage will be supplied by the post horses of literature." How literally our own times have exemplified this truth it is unnecessary to remark ; but if we consider the dearth of dramatic talent an evil, we should learn of our ancestors how the player and the poet may be created and continued by encouragement, and from our own experience, how they may be crushed by neglect, or set aside by fashion. It is true that great talents will generally attract all who take pleasure in their display; and thus we have from time to time, a Kean, a Macready, a Miss O'Neal, &c., but the correct performance of a good play, without any great dramatic talent on the part of any individual of the *dramatis personæ*, is

capable of affording a high species of entertainment. To the accomplishment of this feat however the education of a company of players is necessary, and as the appreciation of all art depends on the capacity of the judges who are to decide on its merits, so the degree of knowledge required in an audience, in order to the education of the actors, must not be overlooked. Authors and actors spring at intervals out of the general mass of the lovers of poetry and playing; and the more extensive and accomplished the class, the more eminent will be the distinguished few who are taught and inspired to please them.

We have good reason to believe that the small and select audiences, who fixed the character of a new play in the reigns of Elizabeth and James, were better qualified to judge of its merits as a play and as a poem, and of its representation as a piece of art, than the more multitudinous and mixed assemblies, whose caprice as often as their judgment now decide such matters. Not that a good play, well acted, could now fail of success, but because many points which were conceded to the elder dramatists as natural and forcible, and others which could be looked on with indifference, as having slight effect upon the progress of the play, would be considered by the more fastidious critics of our day sufficient to condemn a modern author. Galling are the fetters which our enormous theatres, mediocre actors, discordant criticisms, and exacting audiences impose on the dramatic writer. The actors of the 16th and 17th centuries, like those of the 19th, were of all grades. Up to 1619, there was no actor equal to Burbage* in the leading walks of tragedy. Pepys says, in 1668, that the part of *Cassio* was ill played by the successor of Harte (Shakspeare's nephew), whom he recollected to have seen in that character at an earlier period; and that Moone (perhaps Mohun) who was the *Iago* of 1668 at the King's Theatre, was

* Burbage died in 1619, and was buried at Shoreditch.

greatly inferior to Clun (an illegitimate son of Ben Jonson), who acted that character in the youthful days of the secretary. Pope says of Betterton,—"Yes, I really think Betterton the best actor I ever saw. But I must observe that, in Betterton's days, the people of the elder sort were used to speak of Harte's superiority as we do of Betterton's now;" and so it has been from the days of St. Ardolio, the first christian actor.* We remember best the strongest impressions, and these are made in youth; very generally indeed the first actor we see dwells longest in our memory; we, mistaking the intensity of our own impressions for his extraordinary skill, and referring to his power of imparting what is due in a greater degree to our own preparedness to receive. Harte and Clun were regarded as inferior to their predecessors, of whom, however, Ben Jonson says, they were unworthy to act his plays. But that splenetic writer had an equally contemptuous notion of the audience of his day; for, in the title-page to his *New Inn, or the light Heart*, printed in 1631, we read the author's indignation at the failure of this last and feeblest of his glorious works. "A comedy," he calls it, "as it was never acted, but *most negligently played* by some, the king's servants, and *more squeamishly beheld and censured* by others, the king's subjects, 1629, now at last set at liberty to the readers, his majesty's servants and subjects, to be judged of." When Jonson wrote this, however, he was feeble and bed-ridden; and he alludes to his illness in the "Ode to himself," prefixed to this play.

"Come leave the loathed stage," &c.

* See an epigram of Matthew Cassimir, No. 100. alluding to the conversion of St. Ardolio, once a stage-player:—

"Ardolio sacros deridet carmine ritus,
Festâque non æqua voce theatra quatit
Audiet omnipotens: 'Non est opus,' inquit, 'hiulco
Fulmine; tam facilem, gratia vice vivum."
Deserit illa polos, et deserit iste theatrum,
Et tereti sacrum volvit in ense caput.
'Sic, sic,' inquit, 'abit nostræ comedia vitæ;
Terra vale, cœlum plaude, tyranne fert.'"

We quote the last stanza :—

> " Leave things so prostitute,
> And take the Alcaick lute ;
> Or thine own Horace, or Anacreon's lyre ;
> Warm thee by Pindar's fire :
> *And, though thy nerves be shrunk and blood be cold,*
> *Ere years have made thee old :*
> Strike that disdainful heat
> Throughout, to their defeat :
> As curious fools, and envious of thy strain
> May, blushing, swear *no palsy's in thy brain.*"

Jonson was then 55 years of age. He died in 1637, aged 63, *of the palsy*, with which he was afflicted at the time of writing the above ode. It was in 1629 that he resigned the mastership of the revels, of which he had obtained the reversion in 1621, and in which he was succeeded by sir H. Herbert. He had enjoyed, from the death of Daniel in 1616, his laureateship and his salary of 100 merks a year, conferred by James I., and from 1630, his increased allowance (for these merks were made pounds), and a tierce of Spanish wine was added to the emoluments of his office, on the renewal of his patent by Charles I. But, even before he was thirty, Jonson appears to have required the consolations of friendship against the neglect of his age. Donne, who addresses him as " Amicissimo et meritissimo," &c. writes thus to him in 1603 :—

> " The state and men's affairs are the best plays :
> Next yours ; 'tis not more nor less than due praise.
> Let for a while the time's unthrifty rout
> Learning contemn, and all your studies flout ;
> Let them," &c.

Comedy, as well as tragedy, looked with reverted eyes for her best supporters. No clown like Tarleton, has probably ever lived ; and when we think of the humour, the pathos, the powers of imitation, the accomplishments of singing, dancing, and playing, and even the extempore wit, required in the personation of that extraordinary

range of characters, we cannot be surprised if few actors have been distinguished as its representatives. Tarleton was perhaps too apt "to say more than was set down for him;" and probably much of his verbiage interpolates to this day the text of Shakspeare. But when we consider the demands upon his powers and the delight he gave, we cannot doubt the versatility of his talents and the extent of his genius. But Tarleton died in 1588, and his successor, Robert Armin, only lived six years after the birth of Davenant.

We will here add a list of the king's company, established by Killigrew under the royal patent in 1660, as the company stood in 1663, when they were acting at Drury-lane. Of the men the principal performers were Harte, Mohun, Bush, Wintersel, Lacy, Cartwright, and Clun; Joe Haines, Griffin, Goodman, and others. Among the women were Mrs. Carey, Mrs. Marshal, Mrs. Knapp, Mrs. Bouteel, and Mrs. Eleanor Gwynn. If we had space to give the slightest outline of the lives of these persons, we need only to point to Mrs. Griffin and Mrs. Gwynn, as affording subjects of peculiar interest; but we must resist the temptation, and proceed to give a list of the performers attached to the duke of York's company under Davenant's patent at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Among the men were Betterton, as excellent a man as an actor, Sheppey, Kynaston, Nokes, Moseley, Floyd, Harris, Price, Richards, and Blagden, Smith, Sandford, Medburn, and others. The actresses were Mrs. Davenport, Mrs. Sanderson, whom Betterton married, Mrs. Davies, and Mrs. Long, all of whom boarded in the patentee's house. There were also Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Holden, and Mrs. Jennings, of each of whom some anecdote or reminiscence may be found floating through the ana, diaries, and light literature of the day; and of whom, as a whole, we are justified in believing, that no more excellent company has since been collected at one theatre. These were the principal players of the 17th century, and of Davenant's period.

William Davenant was born, as we have stated, in 1605,

and probably at the latter end of that year, as he was baptized on the 3d of March, 1606. The advantages of education, which the condition of the wealthy citizen, his father, and the position of his birthplace held out, were not neglected; for William was educated under the care of Mr. Edward Sylvester, who, according to Wood, taught a private school in All Saints' parish; and in 1620, or 1621, when Willie was about fifteen, his father being again elected mayor, he was sent to Lincoln college. His academical studies were conducted under the superintendence of Mr. Daniel Hough, a fellow of that house. At college, however, he made but a short stay; and we might have suspected that some change in the circumstances of the father had rendered a longer residence inconvenient, had not Wood told us, that "Davenant, although he made some progress in logic and natural philosophy, yet his genius was always opposite to those studies;" it might be, therefore, of his own will that he so soon abandoned the pursuit of university learning, "of which," says Wood, "although he wanted much, yet he made as high and noble flights in the poetical faculty as fancy could advance without it." We may believe that the fame of his reputed father might combine with the natural taste of the future poet and dramatist, to induce a preference of "wood notes wild." The "learned sock" of Jonson was less to the taste of youth. Indeed, the influence of those two great men upon the minds of the then rising generation can scarcely be duly estimated; few, like Milton's *Allegro*, would be able to appreciate both. Donne, and the old, quaint, and learned, preferred Jonson for the husk, the mere learning; although sensible of the stern, inflexible, but virtuous resolve of that great moral reformer, the true Juvenal of his period. His glorious comedies, the great and single end of which is still the improvement of mankind, by the cure of some vice or folly, were feared as much as liked by his contemporaries. The "redness of laughter" was often, as he intended it should be, supplied by the "blush of shame," on the faces of his auditory. He truly said: —

"With an armed and resolved hand
I'll strip the ragged follies of the time
Naked as at their birth; and with a whip of steel
Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs.
I fear no mood stamped on a private brow,
When I am pleased t' unmask a public vice."

"My strict hand
Was made to seize on vice, and with a gripe,
Crush out the humour of such spongy souls
As lick up every idle vanity."

And this task he performed, in all its terrors*, through the medium of amusement; to courteous eyes opposing

"A mirror,
As large as is the stage whereon we act,
Where they shall see the time's deformity."

The good, and the virtuous, and the learned honoured the object Jonson had in view, but his muse was too severe for the multitude. Shakspeare's song of benevolence, humanity, and love, charmed alike the grave and the gay, the learned, and him whose mind was in his eyes, and "*omne tulit punctum.*" What a race might have been produced by the due study of these two combined! But the affectation of puritanism first, and the affectation of grossness afterwards, alike tended to warp the mirror and distract its reflections, until the stage became a means of mere amusement; singing, dancing (without a purpose), glare and show, dramatic abortions, without plot or object, and vehicles for puns, practical jokes, and other absurdities, usurped the stages whereon Jonson had taught, and Shakspeare both taught and enchanted the multitude.

On leaving college Davenant, now under twenty years of age, entered into the service of Frances Howard, first duchess of Richmond*, in what capacity we are not

* Of this lady more than one portrait is extant. One by Vandyke was in the Orleans gallery, and there is another at Duff House, Banffshire, the seat of the earl of Fife. The lady is attired in a black silk dress, a capuchin over her head, a white ruff round the neck and bosom, and the boddice richly adorned with rows of pearls The left hand holds a long cane, and the right rests on a table. Smith thinks that the Orleans picture is now in the possession of the marquis of Bath at Longleat.

informed: of the retinue of that magnificently disposed lady, however, Davenant for a short time made one. It was by this means, perhaps, that he was introduced to the celebrated sir Fulke Greville, afterwards lord Brooke, with whom he remained till the unfortunate death of that distinguished nobleman in 1628. Lord Brooke*, who was himself an author and a dramatist, naturally encouraged the poetic taste of Davenant, whose talents he highly appreciated. He was seventy-four years of age when he died, and must have been seventy when he took Davenant into his family. He had been the friend of sir Philip Sidney, a favourite of Elizabeth, a knight by the hand of James I., under whom he was chancellor of the exchequer, and became a peer and gentleman of the bedchamber. He died by the hand of an assassin; for, having differed with his servant Haywood, and reproved him sharply, he, in a moment of unrestrained passion, stabbed his master in the back with a dagger, of which wound his lordship died, and the assassin immediately committed suicide, so that the actual cause of the quarrel was never accurately known. Haywood had spent the best and greater portion of his time in the personal service of lord Brooke, and had probably remonstrated against what he might consider to be an inadequate reward; and his remonstrance being reproved, his passion carried him on to murder. This terrible circumstance deprived Davenant of a patron who might have been of essential use to his advancement. The inscription on Lord Brooke's tomb, among those of his ancestry in St. Mary's chapel at Warwick, describes him briefly, as "servant to queen Elizabeth, counsellor to king James, and friend to sir Philip Sidney." His dramatic works were the tragedies of *Alaham* and *Mustapha*, both published in folio, five years after his death. His poetical works were, *An Inquisition on Force and Honour;*

* His lordship was of the Grevilles of Gloucestershire, who were seated at Cambden in that county, Tem p. Ed. III.; but his father was sir Fulke Greville of Beauchamp Court, in Warwick. Brook House (where lord Brooke died) stood in Holborn, where Brook-street now stands.

a *Treatise of Wars;* a *Treatise of Human Learning;* all written in sextain stanzas. He was the author, also, of *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, prefixed to the *Arcadia*," and pedantically signed "Philo-Phillipus." His tragedies were written in strict subservience to the ancient rules, and neither was ever acted. Such a writer, and in such a situation, would have proved an invaluable patron to Davenant, who was left by his death to shift for himself. It was now that he began to write for the stage; whether from ambition and inclination only, or for bread, does not appear to be determined. However, in the year 1629, within a very short time after the death of lord Brooke, he produced his tragedy of *Aldovine, King of the Lombards*, which was very successful on the stage, and was printed in quarto the same year with great commendation, and with a dedication to the duke of Somerset. He was now introduced to the friendship of Endymion Porter, afterwards sir Endymion, a gentleman of the king's bed-chamber, exceedingly ingenious and influential, whose services to king Charles implied the most cultivated taste, and whom Davenant, in the dedication of a comedy, published in 1680, calls "the chiefly beloved of all, that ingenious and noble Endymion Porter," &c.; and addresses in one of his poems as "lord of my muse and heart." In the description of Vandyck's portrait of him in the royal collection, he is called *sir* Endymion Porter; but the portrait of his wife, in the collection of the earl of Egremont, and painted at the same time, is still called that of *Mrs.* Porter. Henry Jermyn, afterwards earl of St. Albans, sir John Suckling, comptroller of the king's household, the earl of Dorset, and lord-treasurer Weston, became his intimate friends, and they recommended him to the immediate patronage and service of the queen.

Between the years 1629 and 1637 his time was spent at court and in the gay world, and within that space he produced no fewer than nine dramatic pieces — tragedies, comedies, or masques. In the latter he was assisted by

Inigo Jones and Henry Lawes; so that the scenery and decorations, as well as the music, must have been worth the best efforts of the muse of Davenant. In 1637, on the 16th of August, Ben Jonson died, and Davenant was promoted to the vacant laurel. We cannot find the date of his patent; but the grant of the annuity of 100*l.* to Davenant, in right of that office, is dated December 13. 1638.

We will here interrupt our narrative, in order to insert an account of the laureateship, as a matter most important to our subject; nor, indeed, altogether without interest in the history of English literature, since the laurel has been worn by some of our most distinguished poets. It was no slight distinction to Davenant to have received it immediately after one of the most exalted and inflexible of moralists. Davenant's opponent was the poet and historian Thomas May *, whose resentment at the loss of the election induced him to desert the king

* Thomas May was born in 1595, the son of sir T. May of Sussex, "who," says Clarendon, "spent the fortune he was born to, leaving him only an annuity, not proportionable to a liberal education" He was of Sydney College, Cambridge, and his Continuation of Lucan's Pharsalia in Latin and English shows the good use he made of his time there. He was intimate with Endymion Porter, Clarendon, and others, and was a writer of history as well as poetry; but being disappointed in the laurel, and conceiving that the queen's interest had obtained — what he most coveted — the pension for Davenant, whom he regarded as greatly his inferior, he commenced a violent and inveterate enmity to the king's party, and was chosen historian to the parliament. In that history, the spirit of a disappointed malcontent breaks out in every line, and in this course he continued till 1650, little more than one year after the king's martyrdom; when, having attained his fifty-fifth year, he died suddenly and strangely. He went to bed well, and was found dead the next morning, owing, as it was said, to his having tied his nightcap so tightly under his fat chin and cheeks, that he was choked in trying to turn from one side to the other. Fuller tells us that he was buried honourably, near William Camden's body, in the south aisle of Westminster Abbey. Can vengeance be pursued upon the dead? Yes. The parliament had erected a tomb to May, their historiographer, with a Latin inscription; but before the body had rested eleven years in consecrated ground, it was dug up with those of other "rebels," and thrown into a large pit in the churchyard of St. Margaret's. His monument was thrown down and broken up, and in its place a tomb erected to the memory of Dr Thomas Triplet, in 1670. Dodsley, in his *Collection*, in the introduction to May's *Old Couple*, and the *Heir*, the two works of this poet which he thought worthy of publication, gives an epitaph, in Latin, of the greatest severity, written by one of the cavalier party, on the death of Thomas May. His resentment, and its petty cause, his consequent defection and subsequent hate, which led to the distortion of truth in his relations, might well excuse the indignation of the cavaliers; and of course he was valued by the roundheads in exact proportion to the anger his desertion caused among his former friends.

and his party, and attach himself to the parliament and the puritans, whom he had hitherto opposed.

The poeta laureatus was originally an academical degree in rhetoric, which embraces laudatory verses. In 1470 an instance occurs at Oxford, and again in 1512, in the person of Robert Whittington. The king's laureate was therefore, in all probability, no more than a *graduated* rhetorician employed in the service of the king. John Caius of Cambridge, who, in 1506, published a prose traduction of "The Siege of Rhodes," addressed to king Edward IV., subscribes himself "hys humble poete laureate," and was perhaps the first royal versifier graced with that appellation. Bernard Andrews, an Augustine monk, was laureate and historiographer under the two Tudor kings, and received a salary of ten marks. John King succeeded, who was followed by Skelton, who tells us that "Gower, Chaucer, and Lydgate had not been so distinguished," that *they wanted nothing but the laurel.* To Skelton succeeded Spenser, Daniel, Jonson, Davenant, Dryden, Shadwell, Tate, Rowe, Eusden, Cibber, Whitehead, Warton, Pye, and Southey.

The laurel crown was conferred with great honours at Rome, as we know in the case of Tasso, &c. At Strasburgh also a form of a religious character was adopted. Three poets were laureated there in 1621, with the following words,—"I create you, (being placed in a chair of state, crowned with laurel and ivy, and wearing a ring of gold,) and the same do pronounce and constitute poets laureate in the name of the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." We know of no ceremony in England beyond the appointment by the university, the corporation, or the crown, by whom the poet was held laureate in consideration of certain verses, to be produced periodically, in honour of the patron. The salary varied from 10 marks to 100 shillings,—to 100 marks,—to 100 pounds. This last sum was granted by Charles I., in the first year of his accession, when he renewed to Ben Jonson the patent granted

by James I.; and then, too, the tierce of Spanish wine was added to the emoluments of the poet laureate. Charles also gave 100*l.* on one occasion; and on another, during Jonson's first attack of palsy, when he lived in some obscure alley, Charles sent him ten guineas. Jonson acknowledged the former gift in an epigram, which is extant, but the latter he received ungraciously. "His majesty," said he, "has sent me ten guineas, because I am poor, and live in an alley: go and tell him that his soul lives in an alley." We are not sure that the ten guineas might not be as much a sacrifice on the part of Charles as it appeared to be despised by Jonson, whose economy could not have been very remarkable, considering his grant and the income he received from his writings.

The patent granting Ben Jonson 100 marks a year, "in consequence of the good and acceptable service done and hereafter to be done by the said B. J.," was dated February 3. 1616. In 1630 Charles I. renewed the patent, making the marks pounds, with a grace cup of a tierce of Canary Spanish wine, to be delivered annually from the cellars at Whitehall. Davenant's grant of 100*l.* per annum is dated December 13. 1638. Dryden's patent is dated August 18. 1700; but it looked retrospectively to the death of Davenant.

The laureate's ode ceased to be required, or tendered, in 1790.

The affair of the laureateship procured the king a bitter enemy in Thomas May, but a no less zealous friend in William Davenant. He appears almost immediately to have been employed in political business or court intrigues, and to make himself useful to the king in his now growing difficulties. In May 1641 he was accused, with several other persons, of an attempt to engage the army against the parliament. Whether the charge was true or false, he absconded on the publication of a proclamation against him and his confederates. He was apprehended at Feversham, in Kent, and by the omnipotent commons committed to the custody of the

sergeant-at-arms. Either, however, his crime had been less than capital, or the evidence against him weak, for, in the July following, he was admitted to bail, and would have retired to France, but was stopped on his way by the mayor of Canterbury, and very strictly examined. His adventures in the provincial city appeared to make amusement for himself and friends rather than to be considered as disasters; indeed, Davenant seems to have been endued with the true cavalier spirit of daring, recklessness to danger, and contempt of consequences. His check at Feversham and detention at Canterbury, his two months' imprisonment in London, and his vexatious examination in the country, only supplied matter for a "pleasant poem" to sir John Manners of Sandwich. Davenant overcame these petty difficulties, and reached France in safety. During his stay there he met with some mischance which slightly injured his personal appearance; for sir John Suckling, in his *Session of the Poets*, published in 1643, says,

> "Will. Davenant, ashamed of a foolish mischance,
> That he got lately travelling in France,
> Modestly hoped the handsomeness of 's muse
> Would any deformity about him excuse."

And the particular feature is thus indicated: —

> "Surely the company would have been content
> If they could have found any precedent;
> But in all their records either in verse or prose,
> There was not one laureate without a nose."

In reference to this disaster, which the wits took care to impute to a thousand different causes, the symmetry of Davenant's face, which had been handsome and Shaksperian, was not only injured, but he was rendered amenable to the quips and quiddities of the lowest wit. He, however, was a good practical jester, and could enjoy a joke at his own expense; for not only did he laugh at Suckling's lines, but was induced to give a great largess to a beggar-woman who followed him, praying

heartily that his eyesight might be preserved; and, on being pressed to say why she so earnestly prayed for his eyes, she answered, "because, if your sight should grow weak, you have no place whereon to hang your spectacles." This is not the only anecdote on this subject supplied by that ingenious gentleman, Mr. Joseph Miller. Dryden, too, has his hit at the nose. In the *Session of the Poets*, published by the "immortal John," in 1716, among the miscellaneous poems, we find the following verses:—

"Apollo, concerned to see the transgressions
Our paltry poets do daily commit,
Gave order *once more* to summon a sessions
Severely to punish th' abuses of wit.

Will. D'Avenant would fain have been steward o' th' court
T' have fined and amerced each man at his will;
But Apollo, it seems, had heard a report
That his choice of new plays did show he 'd no skill.

Besides some critics had ow'd him a spite,
And a little before had made the God fret,
By letting him know the laureate did write
That damnable farce the *House to be Let*.

Damn'd Holden with 's 'dull German princess appear'd,'
Whom Dav'nant begot, as some did suppose,
Apollo said th' pillory should cut off his ears,
And make them more suitable unto his nose."

In the first verse, the "once more" refers to sir John Suckling's precedent *Session of the Poets*. The *Feast of the Poets*, by Leigh Hunt, may be regarded as the third sessions, and certainly not inferior either in ease or humour to those of Suckling and Dryden; although it wants their satire, which, perhaps, is no loss after all.

To return from the episode of the nose. The king, and still more the queen, had hitherto found in Davenant the ready minister of their pleasures, and a skilful instrument in their political dealings; skilful, but, like all his party, unfortunate. He proved, however, in the time of real danger, that hard blows were as familiar to

him as hard words, and he never avoided occasion for fighting. He could not, like sir John Suckling, deck out a regiment of popinjays, who would do no more than sport their splendid uniforms for the king's service, but his individual arm and head were prompt in camp and council. He returned from France with troops to reinforce William, then marquis of Newcastle, who received him graciously, and made him lieutenant-general of his ordnance.

It was now the terrible year, 1643. Queen Henrietta was at Stratford in June, and remained three weeks in the house of Shakespeare, and Davenant was in attendance on her. She had, at Stratford, 3000 foot, 1500 horse, and a train of artillery, under the command of Davenant. On the 11th July, Prince Rupert joined the queen at Stratford, and the king's affairs looked promising; but we need not remind the reader of the falsity of these hopes. In August of the following year the queen was at Tours on her way to Paris, an exile. Davenant, who was knighted in 1643 for his gallant conduct at the siege of Gloucester, followed his royal mistress, and, while in France, became a convert to the religion of the church of Rome.

The queen's interference in politics continued to be unfortunate, and Davenant was often trusted in her secret negotiations—above his capacity, we apprehend, for he was never successful. His valour pleased the king, who admired his wit and respected his integrity; but his diplomacy does not appear to have merited the monarch's good opinion, as we learn when he was despatched by Henrietta to London on a secret mission to Charles himself in 1646. Clarendon relates the matter in a way at once so clear and characteristic, that we must quote his own words:—"The French ambassador having, by an express, informed cardinal Mazarine that the king was too reserved in giving the parliament satisfaction, and therefore wished that some person might be sent over who was like to have so much credit with his majesty as to persuade him to what was necessary for

his service, the queen, who was never advised by those who either understood or valued her true interest, consulted with those about her, and sent sir William d'Avenant, an honest man and a witty, but, in all respects, inferior to such a trust, with a letter of credit to the king (who knew the person well enough under another character than was like to give him much credit in the argument in which he was intrusted), although her majesty had likewise otherwise declared her opinion to his majesty, that he should part with the church for his peace and security. Sir William d'Avenant had, by the countenance of the French ambassador, easy admission to the king, who heard him patiently all he had to say, and answered him in that manner that made it evident he was not pleased with the advice. When he found his majesty unsatisfied, and that he was not like to consent to what was so earnestly desired by those by whose advice he was sent, who undervalued all those scruples of conscience which his majesty himself was fully possessed with, he took upon himself the confidence to offer some reasons to the king to induce him to yield to what was proposed, and, among other things, said it was the advice and opinion of all his friends. His majesty asking 'what friends?' and he answering that it was the opinion of the lord Jermyn, the king said, 'the lord Jermyn does not understand any thing of the church.' Sir William said the lord Colepepper was of the same mind. The king said, 'Colepepper has no religion;' and asked whether the chancellor of the exchequer was of that mind? To which d'Avenant answered, that he did not know; for that he was not there, and had deserted the prince, and thereupon said something from the queen of the displeasure she had conceived against the chancellor; to which the king said, 'the chancellor was an honest man, and would never desert him, nor the prince, nor the church; and that he was sorry he was not with his son, but that his wife was mistaken.' D'Avenant, then offering some reasons of his own, in which he mentioned the church slightingly, as if it were

not of importance enough to weigh down the benefit that would attend the concession, his majesty was transported with so much indignation that he gave him a sharper reprehension than was usual for him to give any man, and forbid him to presume to come again into his presence." "Whereupon," continues Clarendon, "the poor man, who had, in truth, very good affections, was exceedingly dejected and afflicted, and returned into France to give an account of his ill success to those who sent him.*

It was to relieve the chagrin of this defeat that he commenced, on his return to Paris, the most important of his poetical works—*Gondibert,* a heroic poem, in five books of several cantos each. In this project he never proceeded beyond the third book. The first and second were written during that residence in France of which we are now speaking. Hobbes was there at the time; and, in 1650, Davenant published at Paris a letter from himself to his philosophical friend, and Hobbes's reply, which were meant to serve as an introduction to *Gondibert.* The three first books of the poem were published in London in 1561; but between this date and that of 1646, he had some adventures in real life not less surprising than those of his romance.

About the end of 1649, a project was formed for sending out to Virginia, for the improvement of that colony, a number of French artificers, and particularly weavers. The plan was Davenant's; and, through the influence of Henrietta, (already the *widowed* queen of Charles I., and called the *queen-mother,*) with the king of France, the execution was confided to him. His usual ill fortune attended him; for no sooner had he and his company sailed from the port of Havre, coasted Normandy, and quitted the channel for the main ocean, than he was seized by one of the parliament's ships, made prize of, and, with all his intended colonists, carried prisoner to the Isle of Wight. He was confined in

* Hist. Rebellion, Book 10.

Cowes Castle, and relieved the tedium of his imprisonment by continuing his poem of *Gondibert*. He was kept in continual fear for his life. On the 9th of July, 1650, an act passed the parliament for the trial of him and others, says Whitelocke, by a high court of justice. He was still allowed to linger in confinement at Cowes; for, in October 22., he dates a postscript to the reader of *Gondibert*, which is very characteristic of the man and of the times. "I am here arrived," he says, "at the middle of the third book, which makes an equal half of the poem; and I was now, by degrees, to present you (as I promised in the preface) the several keys of the main building, which should convey you through such short walks as give an easy view of the whole frame. But it is high time to strike sail and cast anchor (though I have run but half my course), when, at the helm, I am threatened with death; who, though he can visit us but once, seems troublesome; and, even in the innocent, may beget such gravity as diverts the music of verse. And I beseech thee (if thou art so civil as to be pleased with what is written) not to take it ill that I run not on to my last gasp. For though I intended, in this poem, to strip nature naked, and clothe her again in the perfect shape of virtue, yet, even in so worthy a design, I shall ask leave to desist, when I am interrupted by so great an experiment as dying; and it is an experiment to the most experienced, for no man (though his mortifications be much greater than mine) can say *he has already died.*"

Before the end of the year he was brought to London and committed to the Tower, in order to his trial, and here he remained two years; but, thanks to the influence and mediation of Milton and others, he was allowed his liberty as a prisoner at large, and thus his mind was not distracted from the pursuit of his poem, of which, as we have already said, the three books were published in 1651, with commendatory verses by Waller and Cowley. It is evident that his poetry served him more than his politics; for we know

that the stern Milton could have been influenced to overlook the latter by nothing but the former. Wood tells us that Davenant owed much to the good offices of two godly aldermen of York, to whom he had shown great civility when they were taken prisoners in the north by some of the forces under William duke of Newcastle. But Wood also says, that the liberty, and even the life, of Davenant were granted to the prayer of Milton. Happily this great service was nobly repaid; for, according to Richardson, in his *Life of Milton*, prefixed to his and his father's explanatory notes and remarks on Milton's Paradise Lost, "sir William Davenant obtained the poet's remission at the Restoration, in return for his own life preserved by Milton's interest when he himself was under condemnation in the year 1650. A life was owing to Milton, and it was nobly paid,—Milton's for Davenant's." The truth of this very agreeable anecdote can hardly be doubted; for Betterton, who had heard it from Davenant's lips, repeated the story to Pope, who was Richardson's authority. The greatest interest in the poetical life of Davenant is assuredly his forming this connecting link between Shakspeare and Milton. Indeed, to Davenant is due, remotely but really, the existence of the *Paradise Lost;* and Milton owes him fame as well as life.

On the 9th of October, 1652, Davenant was still a free prisoner within the liberties of the Tower. He wrote on that day to Whitelocke, one of the lords commissioners of the great seal, a letter, which is preserved in *Whitelocke's Memorials*, and is to the following effect:—"My lord, I am in suspense whether I should present my thankfulness to your lordship for my liberty of the Tower; because, when I consider how much of your time belongs to the public, I conceive that to make a request to you, and to thank you afterwards for the success of it, is to give you no more than a succession of trouble, unless you are resolved to be continually patient and courteous to afflicted men,

and agree in your judgment with the late wise cardinal, who was wont to say, 'if he had not spent as much time in civilities as in business, he had undone his master.' But while I endeavour to excuse this present of thankfulness, I should rather ask your pardon for going about to make a present to you of myself; for it may argue me to be incorrigible, that after so many afflictions, I have yet so much ambition as to desire to be at liberty, that I may have more opportunity to obey your lordship's commands, and show the world how much I am," &c.

From Whitelocke's preserving this letter, we may suppose that he did not neglect its purpose, and soon after Davenant was at liberty. His means of living now are inexplicable. The queen, who preserved her kindness towards him, was in France, and little able to assist him. The prince Charles, whom he had served, was running a course that disabled him, even had he inclination, to support his decayed adherents. Davenant had, doubtless, some little allowance from the duchess of Richmond, and perhaps also from lord Brooke; but these were temporary. His private property must have been expended or alienated, and his pension from the crown had long been confiscated by the government of the usurpation. From the date of the above letter to Whitelocke, however, we hear no more of him till 1656, in which year his son Charles was born. It was on the 11th of February, 1647, that an ordinance was issued by the lords and commons, whereby all stage-players and players of interludes and common plays were declared rogues, and liable to be punished according to the statutes of the 39th of queen Elizabeth, and the 7th of king James I.* The lord mayor, jus-

* We have already alluded to the efforts made in those times for the *reform* of the stage, but the instruments for that purpose were now applied to its total suppression In 1589, the privy council called on the lord mayor to appoint a fitting person to sit with the master of the revels, appointed by the crown, and a clergyman, to be named by the archbishop of Canterbury, and to these three were to be entrusted the morality of the stage,—an admirable commission. In 1593, the privy council sent letters, dated Oatlands, to both the universities, prohibiting the performance of

tices of the peace, and sheriffs of the city of London and Westminster, and of the counties of Surrey and Middlesex, were likewise authorised and required to pull down and demolish all playhouses within their jurisdiction, and apprehend any persons convicted of acting, who were to be publicly whipped; after which they were to be bound in a recognisance to act no more; and, in case of a refusal to enter into such obligation, the parties were to be committed until they found such security. If, after conviction, they offended again, they were thereby declared incorrigible rogues, and to be punished and dealt with as such. It was also declared that all monies collected at playhouses should be forfeited to the poor; and a penalty of five shillings was imposed on every person who should be present at a dramatic entertainment.

The severity of this enactment shows how distasteful it was to the people, and this still more clearly shown; for even in 1648 plays were acted at the Cock-pit, but the soldiers entered and put the players to flight. On the 13th of February in that year, Cromwell published another edict against plays; and captain Betham was appointed provost-marshal, with power to seize upon all ballad-singers and to suppress stage plays. It was the loyalty inculcated by the songs and interludes that galled the usurpation, not the lack of morality in the actors or their plays. The people were not to be weaned from their amusements, nor the players terrified from their pursuits. Most of the latter were in array for the king; but still, as Evelyn says, in 1649, the very year of the king's death, "I heard common players at Paul's Wharf, a rare thing in these days." So a play, though

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common players within five miles of Oxford or Cambridge; and especially forbidding their performance at the village of Chesterton, near Cambridge, on the water side: another salutary regulation, which, as we know, did not extend to players protected by the royal license: in 1597, an act raised for the punishment of rogues and vagabonds, among whom were included common players of interludes, and minstrels wandering about "other than those *properly constituted.*" This excellent law was renewed in 1601.

a rarity, was yet like a prayer, attainable, among the select. The commanding officer at Whitehall was sometimes induced to permit a play to be acted at some distance from town. The nobility had private plays at their country-houses; and, on particular festivals, even the Red Bull Theatre was suffered to be open; but all this was permissive or by stealth: the men at the head of affairs were still implacably set against every effort of polite literature, and every thing the court had patronised. The poor players were reduced to great extremities, and appear to have lived rather on their manuscripts than on their acting. This was the good brought out by this great evil,— plays were then published which had hitherto been kept in obscurity. They were the working tools of the different companies of players, who were anxious to keep the peculiar mysteries of their craft, their own stock-plays, to themselves, until forced by want of bread to part with them to the booksellers. The number of plays now published shows what a true love for the drama lingered amongst the people, even under the severe affliction of these heavy penalties. The best proof of the real spirit of these pretended religionists is, that while plays were put down in 1647, cock-fighting was not suppressed till 1654. Between 1652 and 1656, then, we may suppose that Davenant lived on the hospitality of the loyalists, on his occcasional efforts for the publishers, and by the sale of his manuscripts. In 1648 was published a second edition of his *Madagascar* and other poems, with commendatory verses by Carew, Endymion Porter, Suckling, and Habington. On the 23d of May 1656, however, he commenced a new course of action.

Sir John Maynard, then Mr. Maynard, sergeant at law, and several sufficient citizens, became his guarantees that, in the production of a certain species of performance which he meditated, all should be done with decency and seemliness, and without rudeness and profaneness. On this security, and aided by the patronage

of Whitelocke, and other persons of rank, who were secretly averse to the cant and hypocrisy that then prevailed, he obtained permission to open a sort of theatre in Rutland House, Charter-house Yard. The performances were called "Declamations, &c., after the manner of the Ancients." And at first they consisted of scenic effects, dialogue, and music, vocal and instrumental; afterwards they assumed the shape of operas; and after two years' continuance at Charter-house Yard without the least molestation, Davenant removed westward, and, emboldened by impunity, re-opened the Cockpit in Drury Lane, and his entertainments grew gradually more and more regularly dramatic. In 1659, Monk marched from Scotland towards London, and the cavaliers began to talk of the approaching Restoration. The citizens in particular longed for that event, and for relief from the grievous oppression of "liberty," under which they had so long groaned. The actors began to look up, and were encouraged. A few of the old actors assembled at the Red Bull, in St. John-street, and acted repeatedly; while Rhodes, a bookseller, who had formerly been wardrobe-keeper at the Blackfriars, fitted up the Cockpit in Drury Lane, from which Davenant removed, and, with his apprentices and other amateurs, began to give plays: both houses were completely successful, and of Rhodes's juvenile company one (Betterton) became a most distinguished tragedian, and another (Kynaston) was hardly less celebrated in his line. Davenant, on the advance of Rhodes, went to a temporary theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and there awaited the Restoration. In 1660, the grand entry of Charles II. intoxicated the citizens, and plays were demanded as the flesh-pots of Egypt by the famished Israelites. Davenant and Killigrew were candidates for patents to open theatres by monopoly. And in the very year of the Restoration, to Davenant, who, having had a patent from Charles I. before the breaking out of the civil war, was deemed to possess the prior claim, a renewal of his patent was readily

granted; Charles II. being very glad, in all probability, that he could so easily repay the long and steadfast services of a faithful adherent. Killigrew, whose claim was certainly more doubtful, obtained another; and thus the two patent theatres were established, nearly as they remain at the present moment.

On the 5th of November, 1660, articles were drawn between Davenant on the one side, and Betterton, Nokes, Underhill, and the other performers whom Rhodes had collected together, on the other, erecting themselves into a distinct company, of which Sir William was the manager. They were immediately sworn in before the lord chamberlain, whose anomalous and ill-defined power over the theatres was thus restored, as servants of the crown, and styled "the Duke of York's Company of Comedians."

Mr. Thomas Killigrew collected to himself the remains of the old companies, including those who had gathered together at the Red Bull; they were sworn in, like the others, servants of the crown, by the lord chamberlain, and styled "the Company of the King."

The first theatrical campaign under the Restoration now commenced in earnest. The king's company removed from the Red Bull westward, and took up their abode in Gibbon's Tennis-court, Vere-street, Clare Market, where they remained until the building of the new theatre, in Drury Lane, which was completed in 1663, and opened with Beaumont and Fletcher's comedy of *The Humorous Lieutenant*, which was acted twelve times in succession.

Davenant's new theatre in Portugal-row, Lincoln's Inn Fields, was opened early in 1662, after several of the plays had been carefully rehearsed at the old Blackfriars Theatre, now the Apothecaries' Hall. The Lincoln's Inn Theatre was not large enough for the audiences, nor sufficiently convenient for the actors; so that Sir William, who was now wealthy, laid the foundation of another theatre, near the old house in Salisbury-court, which was to be called the Duke of

York's Theatre, in Dorset Gardens; but this theatre Davenant did not live to see completed.

So far the stage was admirably successful, and the managers reaped a golden harvest; now, the actors began to presume on their position, and to conceive authors and audiences made for them. Heavy calamities followed.

In 1665, the plague broke out, and speedily put an end to all playing in London. This terrible affliction was scarcely removed, when, in 1666, the great fire destroyed the metropolis, and, of course, suspended every species of public entertainment. There had been an interval of eighteen months, but, in 1666, at Christmas, the theatres were again opened, the plague and the fire appeared to be forgotten, and public diversions were as eagerly pursued as ever. Both companies were successful while the novelty of their pieces lasted; but in a short time the Duke's Theatre declined in attraction, and Davenant, looking forward with too much eagerness to the effect of his new and splendid theatre in Dorset Gardens, sickened in March 1668, and died on the 17th of April, in the 64th year of his age. Lady Davenant, of whom we have not been able to discover any previous mention, was joined with Betterton and Harris in the management of the theatre, with the assistance of her eldest son, Charles Davenant, LL.D., who was born at Cheam, in Surrey, in 1656; graduated at Baliol College, which he left without a degree; who, at nineteen, wrote a play called *Circe,* and afterwards became a member of parliament, and an eminent civilian and politician. In 1687, he assigned the patent, which came to him at his mother's death, to his brother Alexander, who sold his interest in it to Rich, in 1690. Charles and Alexander Davenant are responsible for the deterioration of the drama by sound and spectacle, but to sir William is due the credit of some successful efforts to restore a more classical school, a greater correctness in the conduct of the play, and the introduction, from abroad, of scenery appropriated to

the purposes of the poet. His taste in this department is indisputable, and it was, doubtless, formed as much by his association with Inigo Jones as by his experience of the continental theatres. Of his third son we know nothing; but he probably died early. His fourth, the Rev. W. Davenant, had a living in Surrey, procured, perhaps, through the interest of his mother's relatives, who lived near Cheam. He was travelling tutor to an English gentleman, the patron of his living, when he was drowned accidentally in a river near Paris, in 1681. Sir William, who was evidently an amiable as well as an able man, performed with integrity a father's duty to his children. A strong trait of domestic affection appears, in leaving his son to assist his mother in the management of her patent.

The following list of Davenant's dramatic writings is gathered, as to its facts, from Gerard Langbaine's Account of the English Dramatic Poets, edition 1691, and confirmed by Wood's *Athenæ Oxonienses* edition of 1721.

1. *Albovine, King of the Lombards, his Tragedy*; published in 4to. in 1629.

This first play of Davenant's, which is not free from bombast, nor entirely chaste in its language, was founded on a tale in the fourth volume of Bandello's *Histoires Tragiques*. It was dedicated to the unfortunate duke of Somerset, and recommended by eight copies of verses from as many friends.

2. The *Just Italian*; a tragi-comedy, of which the scene lies at Florence. It was acted at the Blackfriars in 1630, and published the same year in 4to., with commendatory verses from Hopkins and Carew, and with a dedication to the earl of Dorset.

3. *The Cruel Brother*; a tragedy, of which again the scene lies in Italy. It was produced at the Blackfriars, and printed in 4to. in 1630. This play was dedicated to the lord high-treasurer Weston. (In some lists of our author's works, the masque of *Cœlum Britannicum*, performed at Whitehall in 1633, stands next, and it takes that place in the folio edition of Dave-

nant's works. But Carew and Inigo Jones were its authors; that is, Carew supplied the plot and poetry, Lawes the music, and Inigo Jones the decorations.)

4. The *Triumph of Prince D'Amour.* This was a masque presented before his highness the prince elector palatine, at his palace in the Middle Temple, by the honourable society of the Middle Temple, according to Wood, but of the Inner Temple, according to Baker's *Biographia Dramatica,* on the 24th of February, 1635. It was printed in 4to. the same year. This masque was invented and written in three days. William and Henry Lawes supplying the music of the songs and symphonies composed for the occasion. The names of the masqueraders is given in the first edition of the masque.

5. *Platonick Lovers.* The scene of this tragi-comedy lies in Sicily. It was produced at the Blackfriars in 1636, and printed in 8vo. in 1665.

6. *The Wits.* A comedy, borrowed in some of its characters from the *Wit at several Weapons* of Beaumont and Fletcher. The scene lies in London. It is commended by verses of Carew, and dedicated to "the chiefly beloved of all, that ingenious and noble Endymion Porter, of his majesty's bed-chamber." This was a very successful play, produced at Blackfriars in 1636, and printed in 4to. in the same year. Dodsley has reprinted it in his Old Plays, published in 1780.

7. *Britannia Triumphant.* A masque presented by king Charles I. and his lords at Whitehall on the Sunday after Twelfth Night, 1637. Inigo Jones, "surveyor of his majesty's works" (Wood), assisted Davenant in the composition of this masque, as well as in its decorations, architectural and otherwise, a task for which the frequent foreign travel of that distinguished artist fitted him. It was printed in 4to., 1637, but is not found in the folio edition of sir William's works. It is animadverted on in 1698 by the author of *The Stage Condemned,* who remarks its production on a Sabbath-day as extraordinary; in this, however, he was much mistaken, as

nothing was more common than such performances on Sunday afternoons. The masque was then a very rare and scarce book.

8. *The Temple of Love.* A masque, "presented by the queen's majesty," says Langbaine, "and her ladies at Whitehall," on Shrovetide, 1634. In this masque, as in many others, Inigo Jones introduced moveable scenes, a decoration early used in the court masques, but which did not become common in the theatres till the Restoration. Davenant says of this masque that "for the invention, *variety of scenes*, apparitions, and richness of habits, it was generally approved to be one of the most magnificent that had been done in England." The names of the court ladies who acted in the masque are given in the 4to. edition, published in 1634.

9. *Salmacida Spolia.* This masque was presented (either by, or) to the king and queen, at Whitehall, on the 21st of January, 1639. The words were Davenant's, who was then one of her majesty's servants; the music by Mr. Lewis Richards, master of her majesty's music; the ornaments and scenes, and we believe also the plot or "the invention," were supplied by Inigo Jones. The masque has no place in the folio edition of Davenant's works, and was published anonymously in 1639.

10. *The Unfortunate Lovers.* This is a tragedy, of which the scene lies at Verona. It was acted at the Blackfriars theatre, and published in 1643.

11. *Love and Honour.* A tragi-comedy, first called the *Courage of Love,* and afterwards named by sir Henry Herbert (Ben Jonson's successor as master of the revels), at Davenant's request, the *Nonpareilles,* or the *Matchless Maid.* Under the title of *Love and Honour,* however, it was acted at the Blackfriars in 1649, and met with deserved success. The scene lies in Savoy, and Downes tells us that the king gave Betterton his coronation suit to wear as Don Alvaro; that Harris, as Prince Prospero, wore the duke of York's dress; and Price, who played Lionel, the dress which the earl of

Oxford wore at the coronation. These presents serve to show that the piece, though not printed till 1649, must have been produced much earlier. The year 1649 was twenty-three years after the coronation, and the very year in which the unfortunate Charles was beheaded.

12. *The First Day's Entertainment at Rutland-house, by Declamations and Musick, after the Manner of the Ancients.* This was published in 1656, in which year the declamations, &c. were delivered. The first dialogue was between Diogenes and Aristophanes; and the subject, public entertainment by means of moral representations. The second had for its subject the comparative merits of Paris and London; and the interlocutors were a Londoner and a Parisian. These declamations were interspersed with vocal and instrumental music, composed by Dr. Charles Coleman, captain Henry Cook, Mr. Henry Lawes, and Mr. George Hudson. This was the only species of dramatic amusement tolerated during the interregnum.

13. *Play House to be Let.*

"That damnable farce, *The House to be Let.*" — DRYDEN.

This was a species of nondescript, in six acts, produced in 1673. Each act was a separate piece; the last, a burlesque tragedy, or a travestie of the heroics of Cæsar, Antony and Cleopatra; the third and fourth were a species of operatic pantomime, exhibiting by the art of perspective *in scenes*, and, we presume, by *tableaux vivants*, the adventures of sir Francis Drake, and the cruelties of the Spaniards in Peru; splendid subjects for show, the scenes being accompanied with music, and interspersed with song and recitative. The second act was a translation of Molière's *Cocu Imaginaire*, converted into a dialogue of broken English, as if the French play had imperfectly acquired the English language. Each of these four acts had been stealthily produced during the usurpation, and acted as distinct pieces, whenever the watchfulness of the soldiers, the jealousy of the civil authorities, or the power of the

patron permitted or protected the performance. The first act was written in order to connect the four pieces into a more or less intelligible whole, and to this portion the title refers.

14. *News from Plymouth.* This comedy was repeatedly performed at the Globe before 1673, in which year it was printed in folio.

15. *The Law against Lovers.* This was a blending together of the two plots of Shakspeare's *Measure for Measure* and *Much Ado about Nothing,* the language being "polished, softened, or modernized, where rough or obsolete." The gross presumption of these words time has happily exposed. *Much Ado about Nothing* was produced in 1600, and *Measure for Measure* in 1603; and in seventy years their language had grown *obsolete!* At the present moment, they are more intelligible than the plays of their corrector. In two hundred and thirty years our Shakspeare has done something towards bringing the language to his standard; but the style of the Davenants will never be taken for models. The best that can be said of this attempt is, that it was calculated to recall Shakspeare to the memory of an auditory; the worst, that Davenant called himself its author.

16. *The Distresses.* This tragi-comedy was acted before 1673, when it was published in folio.

17. *The Siege.* A tragi-comedy, printed in 1673.

18. *The Fair Favourite.* A tragi-comedy, also printed in the folio of 1673.

19. *Siege of Rhodes.* This play was in two parts, after the manner of Shakspeare's chronicle histories; that is to say, in two distinct plays. They were written during the Cromwellian period; and, if acted at all before the Restoration, it must have been by stealth. When, however, sir William Davenant opened the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the *Siege of Rhodes* was the opening play; and it introduced for the first time *in a public theatre,* numerous beautiful and expensive *scenes.* The scene of the play lay at Rhodes, and the camp near it; and the incidents

were selected* from the history of the remarkable siege by Solyman the Second, who took Rhodes in 1522.

20. *Man's the Master;* a comedy. This, the last dramatic effort of Davenant, and produced a short time before his death, was little more than an adaptation from the *Jodelet, ou le Maitre Valet,* of Scarron, and *L'Héritier Ridicule* of the same writer.

Connected with the dramatic works of Davenant is an enormity which we would fain pass over,—his alteration of *The Tempest,* in which massacre he was assisted by Dryden. Every one in those days appears to have thought himself justified in remoulding Shakspeare, in taking the same liberty with his plays which he had done with those of his predecessors,—but without his justification; for what he had purified and converted into silver, they strove hard to restore to its original dross. Fletcher had already altered *The Tempest* into the *Sea Voyage,* and Suckling had made out of it his *Goblins.* But, in both cases, although the hint was taken, the authors were responsible for their work, and a something of originality was apparent. But in the adaptation of *The Tempest* by Davenant and Dryden, the pretence was to improve Shakspeare. Dryden says, in the preface to their version, printed in 4to., 1669, "Sir William Davenant, as he was a man of quick and piercing imagination, soon found out that somewhat might be added to the design of Shakspeare, of which neither Fletcher nor Suckling had ever thought. And, therefore, *to put the last hand to it,* he designed the counterpart to Shakspeare's plot, namely, that of a man who had never seen a woman; that, by this means, those two characters of innocence and love might the more illustrate and commend each other. This excellent contrivance he was pleased to communicate to me, and to desire my assistance in it. I confess, that from the very first moment it so pleased me, that I never writ anything with more delight. I might likewise do him the justice to acknowledge that my writing received daily

his amendments; and that is the reason why it is not so faulty as the rest, which I have done without the help or correction of so judicious a friend. The comical parts of the Sailors were also of his invention." This mock humility on the part of Dryden, and his fawning on Davenant, are quite worthy of the business they had in hand.

In his Essay on Heroick Plays, Dryden takes occasion to compliment sir William, — more justly, by the way, and after he was dead too. "The first light we had of them," he says, "on the English stage, was from the late sir William Davenant; it being forbidden him, in the rebellious times, to act tragedies and comedies, because they contained some matter of scandal to those good people who could more easily dispossess their lawful sovereign, than endure a wanton jest; he was forced to turn his thoughts another way, and to introduce examples of morality, writ in verse, and performed in recitative with music. The original of the music, and of the scenes which adorned his work, he had from the Italian operas; but he heightened his characters (as I may probably imagine) from the examples of Corneille, and some French poets. In this condition did this part of poetry remain at his majesty's return; when, growing bolder, as now being owned by a public authority, Davenant reviewed his *Siege of Rhodes*, and caused it to be acted as a just drama. But as few men have the happiness to begin and finish any project, so neither did he live to make his design perfect. There wanted the fulness of a plot, and the variety of characters, to form it as it ought; and, perhaps, somewhat might have been added to the beauty of the style; all of which he would have performed with more exactness, had he pleased to give us another work of the same nature. For myself, and all others who come after him, we are bound, with all veneration to his memory, to acknowledge what advantage we received from that excellent ground-work which he laid; and, since it is an easy thing to add to what already is

invented, we ought, all of us, without envy to him, or partiality to ourselves, to yield him the precedence in it."

In the preface to *The Tempest* already quoted, Dryden speaks of Davenant's genius, and mode of composition. "I found him," he says, "of so quick a fancy, that nothing was proposed to him, on which he could not suddenly produce a thought extremely pleasant and surprising; and those first thoughts of his, contrary to the Latin proverb, were not always the least happy. And as his fancy was quick, so likewise were the products of it remote and new. He borrowed not of any other; and his imaginations were such as could not easily enter into any other man. His corrections were short and judicious, and he corrected his own writings more severely than those of another man, bestowing twice the time and labour in polishing which he used in invention."

The *Gondibert* of Davenant was intended to be a species of epic drama, an heroic play in five books, or a poem in five acts. The first two books were written before his intended, but intercepted, voyage to America; and in 16[illegible], he published a letter to his friend Hobbes, the philosopher, at that time tutor to the earl of Cavendish, and a letter from Hobbes in reply, which serve as an introduction to the poem of *Gondibert*. Davenant's letter is dated from the Louvre at Paris, where he was in attendance on the queen Henrietta Maria; and that of Hobbes also from Paris. Hobbes afterwards, in a letter dated Chatsworth, and addressed to his pupil, speaks highly of *Gondibert;* the third book of which was finished during the imprisonment of the author at the Isle of Wight. The first three books were printed at London in 1657. Hobbes said he "never yet saw a poem that had so much shape of art, health of morality, and vigour and beauty of expression as this;" and Mr. Edward Howard, in his preface to his *British Princes*, says, "that though *Gondibert* coming into the world in a time of capricious censure perhaps met with an undeserved reception, yet

the severest judges are forced to grant that there is in that work more to be praised than pardoned." Rymer, who, in his translation of Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poetry*, is very hard on *Gondibert*, says, "his battles are not less liable to censure than those of Homer," and "the emerald he gives to Bertha has a stronger tang of the old woman, and is a greater improbability, than all the enchantments of Tasso." "The thoughts," he says, "are great, and there appears something roughly noble throughout his fragment." Blackwell, professor of Greek in the university of Aberdeen, in an *Inquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer*, published in London in 1735, alluding to sir W. Davenant's *Gondibert*, says, "It was indeed a very extraordinary project of our ingenious countryman to write an epic poem without making fables, or allowing the smallest fiction throughout the composition." Denham and the two Downes were very severe on *Gondibert* and its author; and sir Allan Broderick published certain verses to be reprinted with the second edition of *Gondibert*, to which Davenant replied by a *Vindication of the incomparable Poem 'Gondibert' from the Wit-cabals of four Esquires, — Clinias, Dametas, Sancho, and Jack-pudding.**

As a dramatist, Davenant was deservedly successful; as a poet, his claim is less valid, notwithstanding the praises bestowed by some writers on his *Gondibert*. He was a faithful and loyal servant to the king, a grateful follower of the queen, and appears to have been generally loved and respected. He was buried on the 19th April in Westminster Abbey, very near to the body of his old opponent May. The inscription on his tomb was in imitation of that on the monument of Ben Jonson —

"O! Rare Sir William Davenant!"

* Southey calls sir William Davenant, "this eminently thoughtful poet," and speaks of him as "one who had held no inconsiderable place in the literature of his own times," as one who felt that he was not likely to be forgotten by posterity."

THOMAS OTWAY.

(1651—1685.)

If sorrow and suffering were sufficient to inspire the power of painting their effects, we should not be surprised at the pathos of Otway. He was a stricken, but a patient sufferer; and his tenderness of feeling, his sensitiveness, the recoil and gush of his own affections, appear to have taught him the way to the heart. No one possessed and exercised a more entire command of those keys which, Gray says, "ope the source of sympathetic tears," and the spring of his power may be traced to the tears which, in a short but melancholy career, he shed himself.

He was born at Trotton in Sussex, on the 3d of March, 1651, and he died in London on the 14th of April, 1685. The place of his birth was a parsonage, that of his death a tavern; he was born in hopeful circumstances, he died in a condition the most miserable. His short life may be divided into three periods. In the first he enjoyed the happiness of home and boyhood, the comforts of his father's house, and the affectionate attention of a mother. In the second period, his education was commenced at the school of Wickeham, near Winchester, and completed at Christchurch, Oxford. In the third period he was alternately a player, a cornet of horse, a poet, again a player, and finally a beggar. The first eleven years of his life were spent at home; the ensuing eleven years were passed at school and college; and for the remaining eleven years and a few months he was "upon the world."

His father was the reverend Humphrey Otway, rector of Wolbeding in Sussex, a worthy clergyman, who,

having passed calmly through life in his quiet living, was desirous of seeing his son a clergyman, and he might fairly have anticipated for him a career as usefully peaceful as his own. Nature, education, and circumstances fitted Otway for the church, but he chose to resist nature, thwart his father's wishes, and waste the education that had been procured for him.

Of his boyish days no trace of interest remains. Otway's misfortunes pursued him to the grave, and continued after death. No friend came forward to record his death, or to gratify public curiosity with the details of his life. His friends were ashamed of his death, and suffered him to steal out of memory as one whom they had injured, and from whose reproachful presence they were glad to escape. The actors, however, preserved his reputation for the sake of their own; and "the late ingenious Mr. Thomas Otway" kept his name, at least, before the public in the playbills. Of his father's friends, of his early school-fellows, of his college companions, of his brother officers and fellow-soldiers, of the authors whom he knew, of the wits whom he cherished, not one was to be found ready to preserve a few recollections of the poor poet. Twenty years of his age passed away, and left but three words, "Trotton—Winchester—Oxford," as guides to his career. The intensity of his feelings, the delicacy of his apprehensions, and the waywardness of his character, betray the mistaken tenderness and indulgence with which he was trained at home. He was, we believe, an only son, and by his own act defeated those hopes that were formed upon the early development of his talents. When he quitted college, soon after his twentieth birthday, he came to London. The church was abandoned, a profession refused, he felt the *cacöethes ludendi*,—he had already formed the determination to become an actor.

With this false step he cast away the ladder of his fortune. Home and friends, all early associations and aspiring hopes, were at once sacrificed to a silly ambition. He had no talents for the stage, and was want-

ing in energy and perseverance to cultivate them if he had. Mrs. Apharah Behn, a woman of considerable genius and great powers of pleasing, on whose real knowledge of the African prince, Oroonoko, Southern founded his tragedy of that name, was amongst the friends of Otway at this critical period. He was very young, a decided wit, and, having brilliant talents for conversation, he was an agreeable acquisition to the tea-table of a literary lady. Mrs. Behn's parties were attractive; she was born a lady, had spent several years of her youth at Surinam; on her return to England, had married a Dutch merchant; had been employed *diplomatically*, for which her capacity in gallantry and intrigue fitted her in those days, and had even gained the political end to which king Charles II., in his wisdom, had appointed her. Her manners were free, her society miscellaneous, and, as a dramatic writer, her house became the rendezvous of players, critics, and patrons of the stage. Here Otway was welcomed, and here, perhaps, he drank in the intoxicating poison of flattery, and was seduced into the desertion of his nobler duties for the pursuit of pleasure, and the practice of a profession which, in common with most aspirants, he imagined would secure him a life of leisure. In this society also it was that Otway broke through all the restraints of early education, and acquired that freedom of thought, and licentiousness of expression, which degrade his dramatic productions. Here, doubtless, he was introduced to the original of such scenes as that, now happily omitted, from his *Venice Preserved*, between the doting senator and the Venetian courtezan. Mrs. Behn and her associates fanned the flame of theatrical ambition in the breast of Otway, and he made his first appearance on the stage, in the character of the king in her tragi-comedy of the *Forced Marriage* in the year 1721. Baker, in his *Biographica Dramatica*, says that Otway did not leave college until 1674, but the *Forced Marriage* was published in 1671. It might not, however, have been acted until the year 1721, and we

have reason to believe that Otway appeared at the first production of the play. He failed utterly: his confusion at the sight of the audience was so great, as to deprive him of all power of voice or motion,

> "Aspectu, obmutuit, amens,
> Arrectæque horrore comæ et vox faucibus hæsit."

It is said that he never again attempted the stage, but he continued, though rarely, to perform throughout that season, without the least hope of success, and indeed without any sign of improvement. The player by profession, however, was no longer the cherished inmate of the rectory at Wolbeding; and we have reason to believe that his misconduct now caused a breach, which was never closed, between his parents and himself. He had no resources left, and we fear his dependence and meanness had already begun.

About this time he fell desperately in love with Mrs. Barry the actress, not then Mrs. Barry; for, although Barry himself appeared as Othello in 1724, it was not till several years afterwards that his wife became distinguished as an actress. His letters are full of vehement and impassioned eloquence; but the lady, it appears, was wiser than to throw herself away on one who had no pursuit, and who was, probably, unacquainted with his own mind, and the ore it contained. We know of no attempt, on his own part, to improve his fortune. His conversation was still what was called in that day "sprightly," and, in that day, a good talker appears to have been estimated at a high rate. The earl of Plymouth, apparently a visitor of Mrs. Behn, was charmed with Otway's wit, and used his influence in his favour so far as to procure for him a cornetcy of horse, and with his cockade and his commission he set off for the wars in Flanders.*

* Not a single fragment of Otway's wit has been preserved. There is an anecdote related of a joke he is said to have played off upon Dryden, but if it be true, Dryden's retort is the best part of the jest. According to the story, Dryden and Otway lived, at one period, in a narrow court, where

Otway however was not

> "One who fortune's buffets and rewards
> Could take with equal thanks."

He would rather rail at lady fortune in good terms, than set himself to right the wrongs she dealt him. He partook more of his own Jaffier than his Pierre. He had no love of fighting; and his narrow finances, united with his extravagance, induced him to sell his commission and leave the field of Flanders and the rewards of honour to more daring spirits. He was no more distinguished in the field than on the boards; but it is to be hoped that he made a less discreditable debût in the character of a cornet than in that of a king; and that fire and murder were not more terrible than a vast assembly of human faces. Having thus, like Horace, thrown away his shield, he returned to London, spoiled, and without the means of earning bread: —

> "To dig incompetent, to beg ashamed."

An application to the rectory was disregarded; and, in his despair, he turned to that which should have been his support and study long before, to literature. His genius directed him to the drama, and his first inspiration took a tragic shape; he had now touched the *divite venâ*, and he worked that mine till the last. Before he produced his first play he again trod the stage, but without success; and, in the year 1675, his first tragedy was produced. The events of his life are now confined

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their houses faced each other Dryden was then in the zenith of popularity, and Otway was wretchedly poor. Stung by neglect, and feeling probably a wayward sentiment of resentment against his successful neighbour, he chalked the following line upon his door one night, on returning late from a tavern, designing it, of course, as a sarcasm: —

> "Here Dryden lives — a poet and a wit."

The next night Dryden took his revenge by chalking on Otway's door—

> "Here Otway lives —*exactly opposite!*"

We know not on what authority the anecdote rests, and cannot vouch for its accuracy.

to the periodical production of his plays, which appeared in the following order: —

Alcibiades.—This tragedy was the first production of the muse of Thomas Otway, and was acted at the Theatre Royal. It was published in 1675 in 4to., and again in 1687. The heroic verse is well sustained, but the portrait of Alcibiades is incorrect. The character is rather that of Joseph than Alcibiades. The circumstances of the period and its characters are neither felt nor used as a scholar might have used them. Shirley, as we have seen, wrote a tragedy on this subject, which, however, was rejected by the managers.

Don Carlos, Prince of Spain, was acted at the Duke's Theatre, and published in 4to. in 1696. The Spanish chronicles in the life of Philip II., and a novel founded on them, supplied the plot. Betterton told Booth (so he says in a letter to Aaron Hill), that *Don Carlos* succeeded better than either *Venice Preserved* or *The Orphan*, and was infinitely more applauded and followed for many years. Dr. Johnson does not believe that it ran thirty nights, but Rochester bears witness that "Tom Shadwell's dear Zany," as he calls Otway, "had his pockets filled by *Don Carlos*." The reader knows that Schiller made a choice of the same subject, and produced from it one of his best tragedies.

Titus and Berenice. — This was a translation from Racine, but altered considerably, and reduced to three acts; it is remarkable as a tragedy in English rhyme, and as the *Cheats of Scapin*, a farce by the same author, translated from Molière, is printed with it, there is reason to believe that the two pieces were acted together, being the length of an ordinary play, about the year 1676.

Friendship in Fashion. — This comedy was acted with applause at the Duke's Theatre in 1678; but when reproduced in 1749 at Drury-lane, it was deservedly hissed off the stage for its gross immorality.

Caius Marius. — This extraordinary tragedy was produced at the Duke's Theatre in 1682, under the title of the *History and Fall of Caius Marius.* Plutarch's

Life of the Hero, and Lucan's *Pharsalia* suggested a portion of the plot; but the dissensions of Sylla and Marius are applied, with some ingenuity, to the factions which divided England at the period of the play's production, soon after the time of the Popish Plot. The characters of Marius the younger and Lavinia, are taken as to situation, and, in some cases, come verbatim, from *Romeo and Juliet.*

The Orphan, or *The Unhappy Marriage.* — This tragedy was acted at the Duke's Theatre in 1680, and was very frequently repeated, retaining possession of the stage for more than a century. The plot is founded on the history of Brandon, in a novel called *English Adventures,* published in 1667. It is supposed that the character of Acasto was drawn from the then living original, James duke of Ormond, and that the "canker-worm of peace" that stood between him and justice was Villiers duke of Buckingham. The duke, with all his power, could not have oppressed Otway even if he had felt the inclination. Poor Tom was beneath the shafts of his malice. This piece, which once held a long lease of popularity, will probably never be revived, nor do we think that the nature of the plot would justify its reproduction, even with the greatest talents. Dr. Johnson says of *The Orphan,* "it is one of the few pieces that keep possession of the stage, and has pleased for almost a century, through all the vicissitudes of dramatic fashion. Of this play nothing new can easily be said. It is a domestic tragedy drawn from middle life. Its whole power is upon the affections; for it is not written with much comprehension of thought, or elegance of expression. But if the heart be interested, many other beauties may be wanting yet not missed." Scarcely was the learned doctor's panegyric written than the play was banished from the stage. Voltaire, although with some severity, comments with equal force and truth on the character of Chamont. "There is," he says, "a brother of Monimia, a soldier of fortune, who, because he and his sister are cherished and maintained by this worthy

family, abuses them all round. 'Do me justice, you old pest,' says he to the father, 'or, dam'me I'll set your house on fire.' — 'My dear boy,' says the accommodating old gentleman, 'you shall have justice.'"

The Soldier's Fortune. — This comedy, like the rest of the author's plays, was produced at the Duke's Theatre, in Dorset Gardens (that erected by Davenant), in 1681. The incidents of this play are borrowed chiefly from Molière and Scarron, and in part from Fletcher's *Monsieur Thomas,* and the old play of *Flora's Vagaries* by Richard Rhodes, produced some ten years before *The Soldier's Fortune.* Otway's play was very successful on the stage, and we may suppose that he was handsomely paid for the copyright, seeing that the 1st edition, 4to., 1681, is dedicated to Bentley, the bookseller. It was followed, after an interval, by *The Atheist,* a comedy. — This was the second part of, or sequel to *The Soldier's Fortune;* and, as regards the plot, was borrowed partly from Scarron's novel of the *Invisible Mistress.* It is a very poor play, and was acted, without great success, at the Duke's Theatre in 1684. Both this comedy, and its former portion, have humour, wit, and busy intricate action, but their licentiousness in point of sentiment banished them from the stage; both have since been dressed up as farces, and one, which owes the least to Otway, is still occasionally acted with applause.

Venice Preserved.—The tragedy of the *Plot Discovered* was produced in 1682, between *The Soldier's Fortune* and *The Atheist.* It was successful at the time and has continued so to the present moment; it is, and probably will remain, a standard play, not because of its deep pathos, or the interest of its plot, or the forcible drawing of the characters, or the nervous energy of the language, but because in Pierre, Jaffier, and Belvidera, the three principal actors of every theatre are and must always be fitted with characters wherein to show their powers to considerable advantage. It is a play under the especial patronage of the green-room; and we go to

see it, not for its own sake, but because of the acting for which it affords scope, and the test it offers of the talents of the greatest performers. In its original state it was disgraced by scenes of low indecent buffoonery, the sufferance or enjoyment of which gives one a very contemptible notion of the audiences at the close of the 17th century, and justifies our belief, as expressed in the life of Davenant, that, in the course of this period, the very minds of the people of England had undergone a second revolution. Dryden, in his preface to *Fresnoy*, attributes the continued attraction of this play to the innate genius of the author — the power of moving the passions—the gift of inspiration. "Mr. Otway," he says, "possessed this part as thoroughly as any of the ancients or moderns. I will not defend every thing in his *Venice Preserved*, but I must bear this testimony to his memory, that the passions are truly touched in it, though perhaps there is somewhat to be desired both in the grounds of them, and in the height and elegance of expression; but nature is there, which is the greatest beauty." The play is founded on the admirable *Histoire de la Conjuration de Marquis de Bedemar*, by the Abbé de St. Real, "who," says Voltaire, "deserves to be ranked with Sallust." Otway himself pays this able historian the best compliment, not only by adhering to his conduct of the story as far as the dramatic form of the adaptation would suffer him, but by quoting literally whole passages, as in the speech of Renault to the conspirators, to put into the mouths of his characters.

These are all that remain of Otway's plays, and are probably all that he ever wrote, although in L'Estrange's observations for November 27th, 1686, we find an advertisement to the following effect:—"Whereas, Mr. Thomas Otway, sometime before his death, made four acts of a play, whoever can give notice in whose hands the copy lies, either to Mr. Thomas Betterton, or to Mr. William Smith, at the Theatre Royal, shall be well rewarded for his pains." It might be in consequence of this offered reward that, in 1719, a tragedy, called *Heroic*

Friendship was printed and ascribed to Otway, but evidently without the least foundation. One test of its authenticity was sufficient; in his comedies Otway had deteriorated, and *The Atheist* was no way comparable with *Friendship in Fashion*, but in tragedy he had improved in the same proportion. Let the *Orphan* be compared with *Venice Preserved*, and we must the more regret the loss of the four acts of his last work. His literary works other than dramatic are very insignificant; some translations and miscellaneous poems are printed with his plays (in 12mo.) in 1757; and in the collection of the *Familiar Letters of Lord Rochester, &c.*, printed in 8vo. in 1697 and 1705, there are six of Otway's written to Mrs. Barry the actress, "in a very passionate and pathetic style," says Baker in his *Biographia Dramatica*, and more eloquent than any other of his writings." To these letters we have already adverted. The gallantry and even the licentiousness of Otway's style probably tainted his life; for we have no knowledge of his marriage or of his family.

His habits of carelessness and total want of economy appear to have rendered his whole life a struggle. During the last ten years he wrote eight plays; but during the three years immediately preceding his death he seems to have abandoned himself to utter recklessness. His health was destroyed, he fell from the society in which he had been accustomed to mingle, calamity after calamity accumulated upon him, and he could scarcely drag out existence by all the shifts of his genius. His spirit was literally broken, and he died, in the thirty-fourth year of his age, at a low public-house, called the Bull, on Tower Hill, in which he had concealed himself to avoid his creditors.

The manner of his death, as it is related to us by one of his biographers, is appalling. He is said to have rushed out into the street, starving and almost naked, and to have begged a shilling of a gentleman he met in a neighbouring coffeehouse. The charitable stranger gave him a guinea, when Otway went to a

baker's, purchased a roll of bread, and in the impetuosity of hunger was choked by the first morsel he attempted to swallow. Dr. Johnson doubts the truth of this anecdote, and inclines to the belief that he died of a fever, caught in the pursuit of a thief, who had committed a robbery on a friend; which version is related on the authority of Pope. But, however it occurred, all his biographers agree in the representation of the misery he suffered towards the close of his life, affording a melancholy illustration of the precept, that genius without prudence is a light that leads astray, although it is a light from heaven.

As a dramatist, Otway has been much over-rated. He displays skill in the management of his plots; but very little in the delineation of character. His lines are generally artificial and monotonous, exhibiting few varieties in the versification, and being for the most part deficient in simplicity. But a certain tenderness or sensibility in the expression supplies, in some measure, the place of higher requisites.

NATHANIEL LEE.

(1657—1692.)

Otway, when Davenant died, was eleven years old, and Lee died twelve years after Otway, so that the three lives bring us from 1605 to 1692, or within thirteen years of the close of the century. We have noticed briefly the most distinguished contemporaries of Davenant in the short account of his life, and of each individually the more detailed account will appear in its place. In the period of Lee and Otway flourished Milton and Dryden. The former died in the same year that Otway appeared on the stage, and the latter outlived Otway and Lee, of whom he was the friend and flatterer, and from both of whom he condescended to accept the adulation of dependents.

There are some circumstances of curious similarity in the lives of Lee and Otway that ought not to escape notice. Lee, like Otway, was the son of a clergyman; like Otway he was destined for the religious profession, educated first at a public school, and then at one of the universities; like Otway, he quitted the pursuit of learning for London life, and aimed at distinction by seeking the society of the great; like Otway, he became an actor, failed like him, and like him found at last that *writing* for the stage was the limited service to which his dramatic genius prompted him. For Otway's tenderness we have Lee's fire; for the licentiousness of Otway the bombast of Lee; both felt most, and best described, of all the passions, love, and each with characteristic truth. In Otway all the delicate, tender, and refined affections; in Lee, the burning and impetuous rage, the madness of the passion. Otway

was destined to sorrow; insanity was the doom of Lee. Otway died obscurely, and in want, in the thirty-fourth year of his age; Lee died at thirty-five, in consequence of repletion and excess, in the open streets. They were born in the same county, and sleep together in the churchyard of St. Clement's Danes.

Lee's father was Dr. Lee, minister of Hatfield, who bestowed upon his son a liberal education, with the intention of procuring for him a living in the church. But a clerical life had no charms for Lee, who appears to have experienced throughout his career a series of excitements beyond the control of reason. The madness of distinction led to early habits of eccentricity, but it also stimulated him in his studies. He was born in 1657, educated at home till 1666, and went to Westminster in 1668. He was admitted a scholar on the foundation of Trinity College, Cambridge, where he graduated as A. B., but failed in his attempt to obtain a fellowship. In his youth he was moody and turbulent; at school capricious and aspiring; at college eccentric, but sedulous and ambitious. Disappointed in the object of his ambition, he was easily disgusted with the course he was pursuing. He went to college at a remarkably early period; indeed, we suspect there must be some error in Oldys's calculation of his age. He matriculated in 1668; and his first play was written in 1675, after which period he lived seventeen years, making, from the date of his matriculation, twenty-four years. If then Oldys was right as to his age, he could have been but eleven years old when he went to Trinity College, and only nine when he left home for Westminster. This is not impossible, but it is more likely that the "about thirty-five years of age" of Oldys was a mistake of a year or two. Indeed, if Oldys were correct, he must have taken his B.A. degree, been disappointed of his fellowship, disappointed at court, disappointed on the stage, and have written and produced his first play before he was eighteen years of age,

which is utterly impossible. According to our calculation, therefore; Lee was forty-one years old when he died, having been born in 1651, so that he was twenty-four when his first piece was produced. We have preserved Oldys's date in the comparison with Otway, because the authority is the same for both.

Nathaniel Lee was a good scholar for his age, possessed a good person, a handsome countenance, his voice was of remarkable sweetness, he was one of the best readers of his day, and it is recorded of the veteran Mohun, that when Lee was reading to him at a rehearsal, he threw down his part in the warmth of admiration, exclaiming, "unless I were able to play the part as well as you read it, to what purpose should I undertake the task?" This anecdote is related by Cibber, who had it from an actor who was on the stage at the time; and, considering the quarter from which it came, it must be considered as a very high compliment.* Notwithstanding his advantages of education and person, and a favourable introduction into society, his prospects were discouraging. He gained nothing by his dangling at court but the usual fortune which attends the impatient expectant of the favours of the great; and he was not of a character, as he himself expressed it, "to fish long without a nibble." Shut out, therefore, from his terrestrial paradise, the court, he betook himself to its reflex—the theatre,—and tried his talent as an actor. Cibber, after quoting the anecdote to which we have just referred as a proof of Lee's excellent reading, goes on to say, that this very author, this pathetic reader of his own scenes, "whose elocution raised such admiration in so excellent an actor, when he attempted

* Mohun was a very distinguished actor, although Pepys complains of his inferiority to the companions of Shakspeare, whom he recollected to have seen in his earlier years. In the civil wars he took part (as all the actors did), with the king, and behaved with so much gallantry, that the Restoration encountered him with the rank of a major, and that title he maintained, though he returned to the stage. He died in 1684, the year in which Hart retired from the stage with a pension; the year too, in which the duke's company quitted Dorset Gardens for Drury-lane; the year of the junction of the duke's with the king's company, in which year there was but one theatre in London.

to be an actor himself, soon quitted the stage in an honest despair of ever making any profitable figure there." His first part was, as we might easily guess, a king, but an easy part to act, Duncan, in Davenant's alteration of *Macbeth*. This was in 1672, and he continued on the stage for more than a year, until, satisfied of his inability to distinguish himself, or wearied with a pursuit of which the object was too distant for his impatient spirit, he abandoned it for ever.

It is remarkable that neither Otway nor Lee appear to have thought that the profession of the stage required any study or practice. They expected, it appears, to step at once into the place which Hart or Betterton occupied, without effort or labour: — Betterton who was taught by Davenant, Hart who was instructed by Shakspeare, who both, for a long series of years, had devoted themselves in the best school, abandoning all other pursuits, "to the purpose of playing." We are by no means certain, therefore, that the pathos of Otway and the energy of Lee might not have appeared in acting as in description,

> "Aut agitur res in scenis, aut acta refertur,"

had they allowed themselves the necessary time to try; but, though either would have laughed at being asked to paint a picture, carve a statue, write a book, or make a watch without previous preparation, the assumption of an art, not less requiring a peculiar genius and a practised mechanism, appeared to them within the compass of of extempore capacity. Neither appear to have regarded practice as necessary, nor considered that a metropolitan theatre was not the place wherein to make the *coup-d'essai*. It became a healthful practice some years afterwards to train the theatrical aspirant at Bath, or York, or Dublin; and, by long acquaintance with the minutiæ of his profession, to prepare him for ranking with his London brethren. There was no regularly established provincial circuit in the days of Lee and

Otway. The players in the country were such as the Rev. Christopher Pitt describes them : —

> "With pride invested and fantastic power.
> We strut the fancied monarchs of an hour,
> While duns our emperors and heroes fear,
> And Cleomenes starves in earnest here:
> The mightiest kings and queens we keep in pay,
> Support their pomp on eighteen pence a day;
> Great Cyrus for a dram has pawn'd his coat,
> And all our Cæsars can't command a groat."

Yet these are the artists who, according to the same authority, present the stage as it was at its best : —

> "Such as your homely fathers used to love,
> Who only came to hear and to improve;
> Humbly content and pleased with what was dress'd,
> When Otway, Lee, and Shadwell ranged the feast."

Lee, however, had no taste for hard labour and short fare; and therefore, finding that he could not raise a theatrical reputation by a *coup-de-main*, he desisted from the attempt, and devoted himself to the drama as an author. His first play was praised in manuscript by the gentle but eccentric duchess of Newcastle, whose voluminous writings gave her more claim to the devotion of the young poet than posterity has thought her worthy of. The gay and gallant, the witty, elegant, polite, accomplished Etherege, the shallow, half-educated Etherege, the despicably wicked and intensely profane Etherege, also encouraged him. Dryden had or appeared to have a high notion of Lee's dramatic powers; and, as Otway was under the patronage of his rival Shadwell, so Lee became the protégé of Dryden; and poetry was whig or tory according to the caprice of the moment. Dryden continued to befriend Lee; but the duchess of Newcastle died two years before the production of his first play, the duke was ill at that period, and Etherege had broken his neck at Ratisbon, nor indeed had he been then in London would

he have possessed the least influence in the new state of affairs. Notwithstanding the want of a noble patron, however, Lee was successful; and we will now consider his plays in the order of their production up to the melancholy period of his mental alienation.

Nero.—A tragedy acted in 1675 at the Theatre Royal, and published the same year under the title of *Nero, Emperor of Rome, his Tragedy.* It is written in prose, blank verse, and rhyme, very oddly mingled. It is believed that Butler, the author of *Hudibras,* had contemplated a tragedy on this subject, and had even written a considerable portion of it. A tragedy, of which the plot resembled that of Lee, was produced in 1607, and revived, in 1676, as *Piso's Conspiracy;* and an anonymous tragedy, called *Nero,* was published in 1624.

Sophonisba.—This tragedy, with the second title of *Hannibal's Overthrow,* was acted at Drury-lane in 1676. It is written in rhyme, yet was not only tolerated but applauded, and is said to have especially excited the sympathies of the fair sex. The sighing Scipio and the susceptible Hannibal, and the delicate loves of Sophonisba and Masinissa, want all the requisites of tragedy save softness. Lee preferred Petrarch and lord Orrory as authorities for his heroes to Plutarch and the historians. Neither this tragedy nor that of Thomson on the same subject, every rehearsal of which was attended by a splendid audience, eager to anticipate the treat prepared for the public, deserve the success they met with from the public. Lee's extravagance and ranting are scarcely counterbalanced by the luxuriance of his imagination; and Thomson's tragedy resembles rather a lecture on morality, delivered in the form of a dialogue, than a dramatic poem. *Sophonisba* was printed in 1676.

Gloriana.—This absurd and bombastic piece of fustian is a chapter out of *The Romance of Roman History,* printed in 1676, with the addition of *The Court of Augustus Cæsar.* It was produced at the Theatre Royal

as a tragedy in that year, but was not more successful than deserving of success. It was never repeated.

The Rival Queens.—This tragedy, under the name of *Alexander the Great*, keeps possession of the stage, but not as Lee wrote it. The wildest flights of a genius, which had already burst the thin partition that divides wit from madness, make perhaps the charm of this play to those who care not how far imagination is carried by its own impulse. The characters of Statira and Roxana and those of Alexander and Clytus are strongly drawn and boldly contrasted; but it is as a vehicle for splendour and show, and display of horses, elephants, gilded cars, and tinsel finery, that the play of *Alexander the Great* is suffered to remain upon the stock-list of the theatres. Neither its poetry, nor its plot, nor its characters, nor its power of exciting wonder would recommend it to a modern audience, if it were not aided by show and glitter; and with these outward aids the play addresses itself to those whose suffrage is not worth the gathering. It was acted and printed in 1677, and restored with great splendour by John Kemble in 1795. *Alexander the Great* was probably very popular on its production; for *The Rival Queens*, with the humours of *Alexander the Great*, a comical tragedy by Colley Cibber, acted at Drury-lane, in avowed burlesque of Lee's tragedy, was applauded heartily, proving that "tears are pleasure's oracles as well as grief's." Holcroft's *Rival Queens* was an entertainment written for the opening of Covent Garden in 1794; and though slyly laughing at Lee, had no serious purpose of ridiculing his tragedy. In this piece the rival queens are Drury-lane and Covent Garden.

Mithridates.—Lee was nothing out of courts, and cared for no company but that of kings and caliphs, emperors and pontiffs. *The King of Pontus* was acted at the Theatre Royal and printed in 1678. In this tragedy Lee looked more closely to his authority, but in gaining accuracy he loses fire. Dryden wrote the epilogue for this play, and spoke in its praise.

Theodosius.—This was assuredly the highest effort of the muse of Lee, and it met with deserved applause when produced at the Duke's Theatre in 1780. The force of love is really shown with a noble unaffected and impassioned eloquence in the characters of Varanes Athenais, and Theodosius, but degraded by an unworthy episode in the under-plot of Marcian and Pulcherrima. The sacred music performed in this play was the first composition for the stage of Henry Purcell. The plot is founded on the novel of *Pharamon* but Massinger's *Emperor of the East*, played at the Black Friars in 1632, had probably given the hint for the whole performance. Lee's dedication of this play to the duchess of Richmond is a specimen of grovelling adulation equal to the worst of Dryden's doings in this way, without the wit or the excuse of Dryden.

Cæsar Borgia.—The hero of this play is the son of Pope Alexander VI., and the plot is taken from the histories of *Marina* and *Guicciardini*, and Ricaut's *Lives of the Popes.* It was produced at the Duke's Theatre 1680. It possesses the usual proportion of absurdity and bombast with beautifully poetic bursts of passion. The description of madness is one of its most remarkable passages:—

> "Like a poor lunatic, that makes his moan,
> And for awhile beguiles his lookers-on;
> He reasons well, his eyes their wildness lose;
> He vows the keepers his wrong'd sense abuse:
> But if you *hit the cause* that hurt his brain,
> Then his teeth gnash, he foams, he shakes his chain;
> His eyeballs roll, and he is mad again."

Lucius Junius Brutus, father of his country.—A good play acted, in 1681, at the Duke's Theatre. History and romance are mingled in the plot, Florus, Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the romance of *Clelia,* and Shakspeare's *Hamlet,* supply the somewhat incongruous materials; but manly spirit, force, and vigour, with less than the usual quantity of bombast pervade

the language. The play was deemed so antimonarchical in its tendency, that the lord-chamberlain, Arlington, caused it to be suppressed after the third day's performance. Plays of the same title have been since produced by Duncombe, Downman, and Payne.

Constantine the Great.—This tragedy of love was produced at the Theatre Royal, and printed in quarto in 1684. It is founded on history.

Lee was also concerned with Dryden in writing *Œdipus* in 1679, and *The Duke of Guise* in 1683; and of *Œdipus*, Langbaine says, "It is certainly one of the best tragedies we have, *the author having borrowed* many ornaments, not only from Sophocles, but also from Seneca." With regard to *The Duke of Guise*, it was taken politically, gave offence to whigs and tories, and was attacked by party-writers on all sides. Mr. Thomas Hunt says, in a pamphlet boiling over with indignation, that "in Dryden's *Duke of Guise* the charter and city of London were condemned, and the magistrates executed in effigy; that it was frequently acted and applauded, but intended most certainly to provoke the rabble into tumults and disorders." He insinuates that Lee sketched the play as an argument against popery; but that Dryden, having lapsed to that faith, converted Lee so far as to induce him to make his tragedy a covert attack on protestants. Dryden says that, having written *Œdipus* in conjunction with Lee, he had promised to join him in the production of another play, and that he claimed that promise just when Dryden was finishing a poem, and was glad of a respite. Two-thirds of the play he says belonged to Lee.

On the production of Dryden's *State of Innocence,* an opera, Lee addressed him thus: —

> "To the dead bard your fame a little owes,
> For Milton did the wealthy mine disclose,
> And surely cast what you could well dispose:
> He roughly drew on an old fashion'd ground
> A chaos; for no perfect world was found,
> Till through the heap your mighty genius shined,
> He was the golden ore which you refined."

And Dryden, instead of resenting this, remarks that "these lines will rather be esteemed the effect of Mr. Lee's love to him, than his deliberate and sober judgment."

It was now that poor Lee's insanity, which we have described as constitutional, and as being constantly present, in one shape or another, assumed that terrible form, which rendered him incapable of keeping his place in society; and on the 11th of November, 1684, he was taken to Bedlam, where he remained till 1685. It was here that, being reminded by a wretched scribbler of the wildness of his tragedies, he made his famous reply,— "It is easy," said the coxcomb, "to write like a madman." "No," replied poor Nat, "it is not an easy thing to write like a madman, but it is very easy to write like a fool."

He was several years before he attempted any new work, but at length he returned to his tasks, and the following plays were the work of his restored reason.

The Princess of Cleve. — A tragi-comedy, of most offensive character in much of its language. It was acted at Dorset Gardens, and printed in 1689; it contains Lee's famous invective against women; which however is borrowed from a romance, called the *French Rogue,* and the play itself is founded on a French romance of the same title.

The Massacre of Paris. — A tragedy produced in 1690 at the Theatre Royal, founded on the terrible events of St. Bartholomew's-day at Paris, in 1572, in the reign of Charles IX., and is derived from the history of that event by Mezeray, de Serres, &c. Marlowe had already dedicated the story to the stage.

It may be here remarked that the prices of admission to the theatres began about this period to be raised. The charge to the boxes was 3*s.* 6*d.* The performance commenced at four o'clock; and it was then the custom for ladies of fashion to take the evening air in Hyde Park after the play, and to return in time to supper before the dinner hour of the present day. The principal

performers in Lee's plays were Mohun, Burt, Lacy, Clun, Shutterel, Betterton, Mountford, Kynaston, Sandford, Nokes, Underhill, Tony Leigh, and Cibber, (whose salary was then only 10*s*. per week.) The actresses were Mesdames Betterton, Barry, Bracegirdle, Leigh, Butler, and Mountford.

After the production of *The Massacre of Paris*, "poor Nat's" career was soon closed. He died in 1692, and Oldys gives us the following account of the catastrophe: — "Returning one night from the Bear and Harrow in Butcher-row, through Clare-market, to his lodgings in Duke-street, overladen with wine, he fell down on the ground, as some say, according to others on a bulk, and was stifled in the snow." Mr. Dyce, in his life of Shirley, thus relates the circumstance, as he found it recorded in an old hand on a copy of Langbaine's *Account of the English Dramatic Poets*, which is in his possession: — "I've heard from the actors that Lee was a well-looking man, and had a fine head of hair: he died in y^e street, not murdered, but through inconsiderateness, having drank excessively hard when he was on a milk diet, which was advised in hopes to restore his intellectuals. He acted only low characters as Otway did." The "beautiful head of hair," observes Mr. Dyce, "is very conspicuous in a fine portrait of him in Mr. Matthew's gallery at Highgate," Mr. Mathew's gallery has been dismantled since this was written, and we are not aware who has become the possessor of the portrait.

Poor Lee verified the old saying of the philosopher, "*Nullum sit magnum ingenium sine mixturâ dementiæ.*" Rochester spoke contemptuously of him, but, it must be admitted, with some justice.

> "When Lee makes temperate Scipio fret and rave,
> And Hannibal a whining amorous slave,
> I laugh, and wish the hot-brained fustian fool
> In Busby's hands, to be well lashed at school."

In another contemporary satire he was treated with less delicacy. His malady was held up to a species of ridi-

cule, that cannot be contemplated without aversion. Thus the satirist alludes to the unhappy poet during the period of his confinement in Bedlam, turning also into ridicule, as the reader will perceive, Lee's own lines upon insanity: —

> "There is a den removed from human eyes,
> Possessed with muse the brain-sick poet lies,
> Too miserably wretched to be named,
> For plays, for heroes, and for passion famed.
> Thoughtless, he raves his sleepless hours away,
> In chains all night, in darkness all the day;
> And if he gets some intervals from pain
> His fit returns — he foams and bites his chain,
> His eyeballs roll, and he grows mad ag[ain]

But such was the heartless levity and revolting malice that disgraced the satires of that day. All, perhaps, that need be said of Lee's plays is, that they betrayed the frenzy of insanity. He would have been a true dramatic p[oe]t, but for that mental infirmity which carried him impetuously beyond the control of his judgment. His tragedies constitute a strange monument of genius and energy in excess.

APHARA BEHN.

(16 —1689.)

Mrs. Aphara Behn, who was likewise known to the reading world of her period by the name of Astrea, made a considerable figure as a dramatic writer in the reign of Charles II. The reputation which she obtained, however, was of a very fleeting nature, being merely based upon the temporary success of some of the most licentious comedies that ever disgraced the stage. The very causes which rendered her popular at the time, and her compliance with the prevailing taste, now operate to her disadvantage, since she is only known as the writer of several scandalous plays, which, though not entirely destitute of merit, have not sufficient excellence to atone for their besetting sins: few or none taking the trouble to search, amid her other productions, for more favourable specimens of her talents. The exact date of Mrs. Behn's birth is not known, but it occurred some time in the reign of Charles I. She was the daughter of a Mr. Johnson, a man very well descended, and belonging to the city of Canterbury. This gentleman having, through the interest of lord Willoughby, who was a relative, obtained the appointment of the lieutenant-generalship of Surinam and its dependencies, which were then in the possession of the British crown, embarked with his family for the seat of his command. He unfortunately died upon the voyage; but the relatives who accompanied him, arrived in safety at the place of destination, in which they took up their residence for a considerable period.

Aphara was said to have been extremely young at this time; but though the facilities for the acquisition of

knowledge could not have been very great, she seems to have applied herself with extraordinary diligence to the cultivation of her mind, and to have taken considerable pains in the improvement of others. The observations which she made upon the country, and the history which she has given of a very interesting personage, with whom she formed an acquaintance, show that, under more advantageous circumstances,—the direction of her talents to nobler objects than those to which they were subsequently applied, — she might have attained a very respectable rank among the female literati of Great Britain. Mrs. Behn's description of Surinam is exceedingly graphic, and written in that true poetical spirit, which is so requisite when the pen alone is employed in the delineation of beautiful scenery.

During her residence in South America, she formed an intimacy with a native prince, whose romantic adventures, dramatised by Southern, and founded upon the novel which she wrote upon the subject, are familiar to every reader. In the account of her conversations with Oroonoko, and the beloved partner of his fortunes, we are informed that she entertained him with details relative to the lives of the Romans, and other great men, and that she employed herself in teaching the beautiful Climene, or, as she is styled in Southern's play, *Imoinda*, useful and ornamental works; while, by telling stories of nuns, she endeavoured to lead her to the knowledge of the true God. The lady's subsequent career gave some reason to suppose that the friendship thus recorded was not of a very innocent nature; but the female biographer, who has appended a memoir of the author to an edition of Mrs. Behn's novels, rebuts the calumny, and declares, that if she herself had been disposed to listen to any improper overture upon the part of the prince, she could have had no chance of obtaining a place in affections wholly devoted to another.

The loss, by death, of several members of her family induced the fair Aphara, then in the bloom of youth and beauty, to return to England; and it appears that,

shortly after her arrival, she became the wife of Mr. Behn, a London merchant of Dutch extraction. The literary tastes and accomplishments of the lady now began to display themselves; and it is supposed that the excellence of her description of Surinam, and the copious information which she had acquired concerning it, recommended her to the notice of the king, Charles II., who, however, in subsequently relinquishing the settlement to the Dutch, acted in direct opposition to her opinion and her wishes, since she strenuously advocated its retention. There is no record of the death of the husband of Mrs. Behn; but, in all probability, the union which had taken place was not of long duration, since, after enjoying no small share of court favour, she was, in consequence of the wit and adroitness which she displayed, selected by the king as a fitting instrument for the purpose of finding out the intentions of the hostile power, Holland, with whom a war had broken out.

At the time in which Mrs. Behn went over to Antwerp to execute this delicate commission, she must certainly have been a widow, since, after a long and odd kind of flirtation with a Dutch gentleman, whom it appears to have been difficult to bring to so decided a point, she succeeded in procuring a promise of marriage. It was from this person that she obtained the intelligence which was the object of her visit. Holding a high office under government, which necessarily rendered him acquainted with state secrets of the greatest importance, he was prevailed upon by an artful woman, with whom he was desperately in love, to communicate the intentions of his employers. The contemporaries of Mrs. Behn appear to give credit to this statement of the effect of her influence; though, in the biography before mentioned, which contains an account of the lady's career in Holland, no real names are given — the enamorato being designated by a fictitious appellation. This gentleman, it is said, amid less important items, confided to his fair enslaver the project then on foot between De Ruyter and the family of De Witt, to sail

up the Thames and burn the shipping. Mrs. Behn failed not to transmit this important piece of intelligence to the king. The information, however, appeared to be so improbable, that it neither met with attention nor reward; and, finding that she had engaged in a thankless office, she relinquished all interference with state affairs, and, entering with avidity into the amusements which the place afforded, carried on a series of coquetries very detrimental to her reputation. As the account of her career at Antwerp rests entirely upon the authority of the female friend who undertook to write her memoirs, it is only possible to hazard a conjecture concerning its truth; many of the incidents recorded, bear so strong a resemblance to the comedy of the day, that they appear as if they had been a little embellished, for the purpose of giving a dramatic air to the narrative, and would not afford much amusement to readers of the present time. The affair with Vander Albert, it is said, ended in a promise of marriage upon his part, which death did not permit him to ratify. He expired of a fever, while contemplating a voyage to England, for the purpose of fulfilling his engagement.

Mrs. Behn was exposed to great danger on her return to her native country; the vessel in which she had embarked having been driven on the coast in a storm, and completely wrecked: fortunately, boats from the shore were enabled to afford timely assistance, and the crew and passengers were saved. On her arrival in London, Mrs. Behn seems to have found it necessary to turn her talents to the most profitable account, her pecuniary resources not being sufficiently ample to support her in the style to which she had been accustomed. Driven by necessity to bring out her works in rapid succession, she was induced to seek for the foundation of her plays in the productions of others, rather than devote any considerable period to the labour of original composition; a disadvantageous circumstance, since it has led to the conclusion that she had little or no merit beyond

an easy facility of style, distinguished for its vivacity when treating of lively subjects, and not destitute of true passion in the delineation of the feelings of the heart.

The personal beauty of Mrs. Behn, her conversational powers, and fascinating manners, rendered her society much courted by the most celebrated literary men of her day. Dryden and Southern are mentioned amid the list of her friends; and she seems to have presided over a large circle of intellectual persons. Jacob, in speaking of Mrs. Behn, says that "she was no less admired in her youth for her beauty, than in her riper years for her poetical performances, in which she excelled all her own sex in the age in which she lived, and exceeded many of her contemporary poets of the other. She borrowed very much from the French poets, and her own countrymen; but it proceeded rather from haste, than want of a sprightly wit of her own." The plays of Mrs. Behn amount to eighteen in number, and are not easily procurable; a circumstance little to be regretted, since it arises from the total want of interest, which prevented them from going through many editions, or being collected after the death of the author. Indulging herself in all the levity of conduct, and freedom of language, which were the prevailing characteristics of the age, Mrs. Behn's plays are remarkable for the indelicacy of the dialogue, and the licentious nature of their plots. In fact, the indecorums, which so justly provoked the censure of Pope, exceeded the license of the profligate era in which they were written, and were the theme of reprehension from other pens at the time. These strictures obliged the author to take some notice of the reproof which her gross deviations from propriety had occasioned. Her own taste was, however, too completely vitiated and corrupted, to permit her to be convinced that she was wrong in the outrage which she committed upon decency; for she contented herself with charging her accusers with being over prudent and precise, and continued to debase her writings with

scenes which could only afford pleasure to the most depraved portion of an audience.

In addition to her dramatic pieces, Mrs. Behn published three volumes of a poetical miscellany at different periods; the first appearing in 1684, the second in the following year, and the third in 1688. A few of the poems contained in the work, were from her own pen; the remainder being the composition of the earl of Rochester, sir George Etherege, Mr. Henry Crisp, and some others. She was also the author of several letters; the principal number being addressed to a gentleman, under the name of Lycidas, to whom she appears to have been strongly attached. The affection, latterly, was not reciprocal; and, while ardently devoted to a beloved object, she experienced that distressing species of neglect so deeply wounding to the female heart. A woman, who has been accustomed to admiration throughout her whole life, feels the more keenly the disappointment arising from the conviction that she has not been capable of inspiring a strong and steady attachment — of securing one devoted heart; and Mrs. Behn seems to have experienced all the bitterness resulting from this mortification. In her complaints and reproaches to her ungrateful lover, it is manifest that the natural gaiety of her disposition proved no preservative against the disquietude of mind produced by the indifference of the man she loved.

The closing years of Mrs. Behn's life, clouded by poverty, and by a misplaced attachment, offer a melancholy contrast to the brilliant gaiety which marked its earlier portion. The advantage, which she enjoyed from her birth, situation in life, talents, beauty, and popularity, seemed to promise a better fate; but whether her misfortunes and disappointments were merited or not, it is now difficult to determine. Her conduct certainly appears to have been exceedingly indiscreet, but might not have amounted to guilt; and we are told by the female authority already quoted, that, though

indulging in a more free and gay deportment than is permitted by the precise portion of society, she never overstepped the bounds prescribed by virtue. Another contemporary, in lamenting her unhappy destiny, assures us that her sense and merit ought to have preserved her from the disappointments which she sustained, and which embittered the latter period of her existence. A long and severe indisposition was closed by death on the 16th of April, 1689.

Mrs. Behn obtained the honours of Westminster Abbey; but rather as a resident within its precincts, than on account of her literary claims. Her remains were interred in the cloister under a blue stone against the first pillar, in the east ambulatory. The following inscription marks the spot: —

MRS. APHARA BEHN,

Died April 16th, 1689.

"Here lies a proof that wit can never be
Defence enough against mortality."

The beauty of Mrs. Behn's person, and her lively, agreeable manners, have been already mentioned; and, perhaps, were the chief incentives to the flattery which was so profusely lavished upon her throughout her life; yet, from several portions of her writings, there is reason to believe that, had she not been pressed by the straitened nature of her circumstances to write for the stage, she might have earned a much higher degree of literary celebrity. The theatre, however, in the reign of Charles II., afforded the sole hope of emolument to the writers of fiction; and but too many authors, who, from dire necessity, were obliged to administer to the depraved taste of the audience, sought for its applause by the least justifiable means. The unscrupulous manner, however, in which Mrs. Behn resorted to these

exceptionable methods to secure success, cannot be palliated or excused; but it must always be a subject of regret, that a woman, who, from her early productions, seemed to be capable of better things, should have been obliged to relinquish the descriptive style, in which she certainly excelled, for the more lucrative, but disgraceful, employment presented by a theatre, which tolerated the vilest and most reprehensible productions. In private life, Mrs. Behn is described as being kind-hearted, generous, and, though warm tempered, forgiving; being not more distinguished for her wit and humour, than for her good nature and discernment; and in addition to the eulogiums of the female biographer who has so zealously endeavoured to place her character in a favourable point of view, we have other testimony. The following passages are from a masculine pen:— "She was of a generous, open temper, and free conversation, with abundance of wit and nice reasoning, above most, if not all I have ever observed in that sex, which though often happy in their wit and repartee, yet are, for want of education, study, and application of mind, generally to seek in the nicer observations, and reflections of judgment. The finer sort of reasoning is most commonly out of their way, and, indeed, not so agreeable as a genteel raillery, and at most a superficial argumentation built on the first appearance of things, which are too often a very false and unfaithful foundation. But Mrs. Behn, in the nicest metaphysical points, would argue with judgment, and extremely happy distinctions; she would, with an engaging air, enforce her notions with all the justness of the most able philosopher, though not with his majestical roughness, which made all she said more prevalent with her hearers. But this is not half her true praise; for her conversation was general, and never impertinent; her vanity gave no alloy to her wit, and was no more than might justly spring from conscious virtue. After what I have said of Mrs. Behn, it will be concluded that she was too great a

favourite of nature to have many obligations to fortune; at least, the latter part of her life found her circumstances much below her desert; and after a tedious sickness, and several years foregoing indisposition, she died soon after the revolution, and now lies buried under the cloisters of Wesminster Abbey, under a plain marble-stone, with two wretched verses for her epitaph, who had herself written so many good."

THOMAS SHADWELL.

(1640—1692.)

THOMAS SHADWELL was born, in 1640, at Lanton Hall, in Norfolk. His father was of an ancient Staffordshire family, and possessed an ample fortune, until the civil wars and his loyalty broke it down. He was so severe a sufferer in the royal cause, that he was compelled to sell a considerable part of his estate to support his numerous family. The elder Shadwell had been bred to the law, but made no further use of his study in it than what was called for in the exercises of his duties as a magistrate. He was justice of peace in the counties of Middlesex, Norfolk, and Suffolk, and honoured the commission he many years bore by the diligent discharge of its duties, and by distinguished ability and integrity.

Thomas Shadwell was educated also for the law; but as his father had preferred the quiet country to the halls of strife, so he devoted himself, not to the laws, but to the muses. He quitted the temple, weary of the drudgery which lies at the door of the law, and unacquainted with the attractions that are to be found within the penetralia. He went abroad, and returning improved by travel, but impoverished in means, he resolved to cultivate his talents for profitable uses. He mingled with the wits, and was found, not only among them, but of them: elegant studies and fashionable amusements engrossed his time; and, at length, he turned his attention to the drama. In this pursuit he progressed so successfully that, in a few years, he ventured to produce his first play, which was acted with applause in 1668.

Dryden, who had, at College, written verses in honour of the protector, lamenting his death, and describing

his own feelings in the way most likely to please the liberals, found it necessary, on the restoration, to court the king, and this he did in repeated efforts until, at length, his services were rewarded with the laureateship, on the first vacancy. This circumstance decided the toryism of Dryden. Shadwell, on the other hand, whose patrimony had been spent in the royal cause, and whose family attachments were all to the Stuarts, committed a similar defection on the opposite side, and falling into the hands of the whigs, was considered of sufficient mark and capacity to be set up as the rival of Dryden. His supposed share in a pamphlet, published by his friend Hunt against Dryden, brought down on him the vengeance of the satirist; and so keen was the political rage against them, that Hunt was obliged to fly to Holland. On the revolution in 1688, the aspect of affairs was changed; and Shadwell, who had poetically hailed the advent of the prince of Orange, received the appointment which Dryden was compelled to resign. The few remaining incidents in Shadwell's career may be briefly summed up.. He occupied his new office but a very short time, having died suddenly in 1692, in the fifty-second year of his age. He expired at his house at Chelsea, and was buried in the church there; and his friend, Dr. Brady, gave this character of him in his funeral sermon:—"Thomas Shadwell was a man of great honesty and integrity, and had a real love of truth and sincerity, an inviolable fidelity and strictness to his word, an unalterable friendship wherever he professed it, and a much deeper sense of religion than many others have, who pretend to it more openly. His natural and acquired abilities made him sufficiently remarkable to all that he conversed with; very few being equal to him in all the qualities and accomplishments of a complete gentleman."

Durfey, who caricatured his plays at Drury-lane, wrote, when Shadwell was dead, an epilogue to his posthumous play, in which he pronounced a similar eulogium upon him: and the earl of Rochester gave an

idea of his powers of conversation, by observing, that if Shadwell had burned all he wrote, and printed all he spoke, he would have had more wit and humour than any other poet.

He produced seventeen plays in twenty-four years. One of his plays was written in a month, and his last was posthumously produced. Of his family little is related: his widow survived him several years; and his son or nephew, it is not exactly known which, was also a dramatic writer.

Ben Jonson was the laureate of James I. and Charles I.; Davenant of Charles I. and Charles II.; Dryden of Charles II. and James II.; and Shadwell of William III. Jonson resigned, Davenant died, but Dryden had, by his change of religion, incapacitated himself from holding any office under the crown, and Shadwell succeeded, on his removal, to the vacant laurel and became the laureate of the revolution. To this cause has been traced the spirit of discord which divided the true poet Dryden and the clever dramatist Shadwell. But the supposition is erroneous, that the difference sprang from the succession of Shadwell to the office of which Dryden was despoiled. The division began much earlier, and originated in party spirit embittered by religious rancour. In the early part of Shadwell's career, Dryden was so intimate with him that Shadwell was accused by Elkanah Settle of having joined Dryden in writing against his *Empress of Morocco*. Of Otway Dryden spoke with lightness approaching to contempt, up to the publication of his translation of *Fresnoy*, when he praised him; but Otway was the friend of Shadwell. It was on the production of Dryden's and Lee's *Duke of Guise* that the quarrel broke forth. Mr. T. Hunt, a citizen, the particular friend of Shadwell, wrote severely against that play, denouncing it as a work which was injurious to public virtue, dangerous to civil liberty and chartered rights, and as every way discreditable to its author. No doubt Dryden's political view of the parallel between the holy league, in the time of the duke de Guise and

of the solemn league and covenant at the beginning of the civil war of what may be called his own day, was ill introduced into the theatre; but the severity with which his pretended parallel was attacked exasperated him into a caustic reprisal, which was chiefly directed against Shadwell, whom he suspected of having supplied his friend Hunt with the substance of the attack. Their religious differences, of course, inflamed the feud. Dryden had embraced the Roman catholic religion, or, as it is described, reconciled himself to the church of Rome, sent one of his sons to a convent, procured for another the appointment of gentleman to the pope's chamber, and educated a third for the priesthood; while Shadwell, forsaking the Stuarts, had pledged himself to the principles of the revolution. That Shadwell had any share in the composition of the pamphlet which offended Dryden is highly improbable; but Dryden's unrelenting satire pursued him as if he had been his mortal enemy. *Mac Flecknoe* was levelled at Shadwell, and among the tories he became a reproach and a bye-word, until at last the name of Shadwell, like that of Durfey or Settle, was understood to signify a "Dennis" or mere pretender. Shadwell, in the mean time, was content with assailing the catholic priesthood, and with quietly working himself into the chair from which Dryden was ejected.

In the contest between Dryden and Shadwell the wonder might be, that the latter should be made to appear the rival of the former; but when we recollect that even Elkanah Settle was by the factious and malignant of that age written up against Dryden, and openly set in opposition to him, we may regard Shadwell as worthy of better and more honourable treatment from his oppoment. But many circumstances embittered their mutual dislike. The two dukes of Buckingham were strangely mixed up with these transactions. George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, whose *Rehearsal* was the wittiest and the severest of all the criticisms on Dryden,—and well it might be so, if it be

true, as the friends of Dryden asserted, that Clifford, the master of the Charter-house, who afterwards replied to *The Hind and the Panther*, and Spratt, afterwards bishop of Rochester, and Butler, author of *Hudibras*, assisted Buckingham in its composition — conferred on him through life the name of "Mr. Bayes," by which title he was alluded to in all the numerous satires which his self-opinion, arrogant estimate of his contemporaries, and, above all, his extraordinary talents and fearlessness in controversy, drew forth. He believed that an attack written by Buckingham, in conjunction with John Wilmot, earl of Rochester, was the work of Shadwell; and while he repaid Buckingham by making him sit for the portrait of Zimri, in *Absalom and Achithophel*, he ridiculed Shadwell, as we have said, in the satire of *Mac Flecknoe*. On the other hand, a severe essay, which reflected on Rochester, Buckingham (Villiers), and the duchess of Portsmouth, written by the earl of Mulgrave (Sheffield), afterwards duke of Buckinghamshire, was visited on Dryden. Villiers, duke of Buckingham, then was the supposed friend of Shadwell, and the satirist of Dryden, while Sheffield, duke of Buckingham, was his patron: to him is dedicated one of his important works, and to him is due the monument to Dryden's memory, now in Westminster abbey.

Shadwell was as inferior, as a poet, to Dryden, as Dryden was to Ben Jonson: but he was a good dramatist, and an honourable man, and entitled to much higher credit, in both characters, than Dryden's virulence would suffer him to acknowledge. It is, indeed, very difficult to ascertain the truth of the events recorded concerning the poets who were mixed up in these contests; for every writer of the period is so strongly embued with party spirit, that it is necessary to consider, not merely whether he was a catholic or a protestant, a jacobite or orangeman, a whig or a tory, but whether he was a Shadwellite or a Drydenite, before we can decide upon the amount of credit that is to be placed on

his statements. Langbaine was evidently favourable to Shadwell, and in general assigns a higher place to his plays, than to those of Dryden; while the partizans of the latter uniformly treat them with contempt. We have endeavoured, in the following estimate of his dramas, to avoid the extremes at both sides.

The Sullen Lovers, or The Impertinents, the first of Shadwell's dramatic works, was produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, 1668, the very year of Davenant's decease, and, consequently, before the removal to Dorset Gardens. It is a comedy, founded partly on *Les Facheux* of Molière; but, according to Shadwell himself, on the report of that play merely, and not from an inspection of the work itself. *The Sullen Lovers,* though in one sense a *pièce de circonstance,* the time and scene being London, in the month of March preceding its production, is, nevertheless, a regular and agreeable comedy, and was acted with great applause.

The Royal Shepherdess, a pastoral tragi-comedy, taken from Fountain's *Rewards of Virtue,* but so altered by Shadwell as to make it, for six successive days, an attractive play. It was produced in 1669, at the Duke of York's Theatre.

The Humourists, a regular comedy as regards time and action, and a well-pointed satire at the prevailing follies of the day. So true, but so severe was its picture of contemporary manners, that a party was formed to force upon the author an alteration of his play. It appeared in 1671, at Drury-lane Theatre.

The Miser, the *Aulularia* of Plautus transfused through *L'Avare* of Molière, supplied the substance of this play. Nine English plays have been formed on the same original; but there is not one of them, not excepting that of Fielding, superior in regularity and humour to that of Shadwell. It was first played in 1672.

Epsom Wells. — St. Evremond compares this genuine comedy to the *Bartholomew Fair* of Ben Jonson. Even the partizans of Dryden could not deny its merit, but

whispered that it was not the production of Shadwell; on his side, however, he seldom lays claim to originality, and may be believed when he does. It was produced at the Duke's Theatre in 1673, and had gone through four editions in 1704.

Psyche, founded on the *Psyche* of the French stage, and the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, was a vehicle for music, dancing, and scenery. It was one of those productions to which the stage had recourse in its extremity, and it was completely successful as far as the manager's objects went. The Duke's theatre was then the fashion: the music and painting by the best masters, and dancing by regular *artistes*, were no small attraction; and we may judge of the value of Shadwell's piece to the Duke's theatre, from Durfey's employment at Drury-lane, to ridicule it by the production of his *Psyche Debauched*, a poor, scurrilous, abusive, contemptible thing. *Psyche* was produced in 167 . ., and, though intended as an experiment and an exception to the rule, was one of the pieces most instrumental in degrading the stage to a place of mere amusement, where the ear and eye were to be addressed, and not the judgment. The younger Davenant is in some degree responsible for this abuse; but Shadwell must bear the blame. The rivalry of the theatres rendered it necessary to seek variety; and we may expect a revival of the Durfey and the Shadwell days, unless we prove to modern managers that, if they seek applause, their contests must be for different objects than that of transcending each other in sound and show. Davenant had found that Shakspeare and Jonson palled on the public taste before he had recourse to Shadwell; and Killigrew had experienced the coldness of the audiences towards Massinger and Shirley, before he engaged Tom Durfey to produce that species of *Burletta*, as it is now called, between the antique masque and the ballet, which, with a dash of the demoniacal, still holds possession of the stage, and always to the

exclusion of better things. *Psyche* was written in rhyme which had no pretension to the name of poetry.

The Libertine.—*Le Festin de Pierre* of Corneille, as altered by Molière, was the origin of this play, the first introduction of Don Juan or Giovanni to the English stage. The horrible catastrophe and the over-drawn villainy of its hero, have long since consigned it to the shades of pantomime and burlesque; but in 1676, it was well received, and considered among the best of Shadwell's plays.

The Virtuoso was also produced in 1676, at the Duke's theatre. It had for its object to ridicule the then rising taste for the study of natural history, and is conceived in much the same spirit with Walcot's *Ode to Sir Joseph Banks*. Sir Nicholas Gimcrack and sir Formal Trifle were then the representatives of a new race; and formal trifling has been a true description of too much of the study ever since. Shadwell did not satirize the pursuit of knowledge, but the bye-roads men took to find it, and the trifling objects which they seized by the way. The play was much approved, especially at Oxford, and even the university noticed it. Langbaine says of Shadwell in this play, that none since Jonson's time had ever drawn so many different humorous characters with such success. Congreve paid Shadwell the compliment of borrowing his Lady Gimcrack, to be the Lady Plyant of his *Double Dealer*.

Timon of Athens.—The History of Timon, the man-hater of Shakspeare, was "made into a play:"—so the modest Shadwell tells us in 1678,—and acted at the Duke's Theatre. The audience that could tolerate this profanation were unworthy of Shakspeare. *Timon* never was an acting play, and Shadwell's version was not more felicitous in this respect than the original.

A True Widow was a true comedy, rich in humour, and diversified and well sustained in character; but it was less successful than the generality of Shadwell's plays, perhaps because, like *The Humourists*, it dealt too

freely with the patronized vices of the day. It was produced in 1679.

The Woman Captain, a meritorious and successful comedy, produced in 1680.

The Lancashire Witches, a comedy produced in 1682, was founded on Heywood's play of the same name, and on its various sources, but with a new feature prompted by the political feelings of the time. The revolution was approaching, religious feuds ran high, politics were keenly and bitterly discussed; and by the introduction of the character of *Teague O'Divelly, the Irish priest*, Shadwell made the theatre an arena for the struggle of parties. The Drydenites, the Roman catholics, and the Jacobites rallied against the play; and the whigs, the revolutionists, the anti-jacobites, and the future orangemen (for whiggery and orangeism were then synonymous) crowded to the support of Shadwell, and, in spite of opposition, carried *The Lancashire Witches* and its author through a successful career. *The Amorous Bigot*, with the second part of *Teague O'Divelly*, grew out of those strong feelings, but was vastly inferior to *The Lancashire Witches*.

The Squire of Alsatia, produced in 1688. The scene of the play (White Friars) is now familiar under the name of Alsatia to every reader, through sir Walter Scott's *Fortunes of Nigel*. So much of the cant phraseology of that sanctuary, as it was in use in Shadwell's day, is introduced into this play, that a glossary is appended to the first edition. The plot is from the *Adelphi* of Terence. The imputations on Cumberland that he had taken his *Choleric Man* from this piece of Shadwell's, produced the querulous dedication of that play, which gave Sheridan occasion to apply the title of Sir Fretful to Plagiary, in the *Critic*, thus more distinctly pointing the satire of that character at Cumberland.

Bury Fair.—This comedy, says Shadwell, was written during the intervals of a painful sickness of eight months' duration, in which the hours devoted to writing did not

collectively exceed a month. The author draws some of his characters from Molière, and others from the duke of Newcastle. It was played in 1689.

The Scriveners.—Sir George Etherege's *Man of Mode* appears to have supplied a character for this comedy, which was acted with success in 1691. This was the last of our author's comedies published in his life-time.

The Volunteers, or *The Stock Jobbers.*—This play was posthumous, acted by their majesty's servants in 1693, and printed the same year with a dedication to queen Mary by the widow of Shadwell. An epilogue, defensive of his character from the savage assaults of Dryden, was appended, and from the pen of Tom Durfey! The play owes a character to Fletcher's *Little French Lawyer;* and though the seventeenth production of its author, shows that his humour was unabated, and his power of drawing characters sustained to the last. The works of Shadwell were not collected till 1720, when they appeared in four volumes, 12mo., with an account of his life and writings. The plays of his youngest son (according to Whincop) or of his nephew (according to Jacob) are sometimes confounded with those of our author; but Charles Shadwell, who served in Portugal, and afterwards settled in Dublin, with a post in the Irish revenue establishment, wrote his *Hasty Wedding*, *Sham Prince*, *Rotheric O'Connor*, *Plotting Lovers*, and *Irish Hospitality*, for the Irish stage only; and they were produced and printed at Dublin in 1720. *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, and the *Humours of the Army*, were acted in London, the former in 1710, at Drury-lane, and the latter at the same theatre in 1713. Neither the army nor the navy of that period is particularly obliged to Shadwell for his portrait of their humours. Yet his comedies have some bustle and incident, and are probably as well calculated to succeed on the stage as more poetical or elaborate productions.

WILLIAM WYCHERLEY.*

(16 —1715.)

WITH NOTICES OF SEDLEY, ETHEREGE, SETTLE, DURFEY, CROWNE, TATE, BANKS, AND RAVENSCROFT.

William Wycherley, one of the most eminent of our comic poets, was the eldest son of Daniel Wycherley, esq., a gentleman of some fortune, at Cleve, in Shropshire. His education appears to have been liberal, but, during his boyhood, it was limited to such means of tuition as the schools in the neighbourhood of his father's residence afforded. At fifteen years of age he was sent to the west of France, where he lived for some time on the banks of the Charante, enjoying the advantages of a refined circle of society, and especially being admitted to a close intimacy with the celebrated Madame de Montausier, one of the most accomplished women of her day, who made a distinguished figure at court, and whose wit and talents are eulogised in the letters of Voiture. The impression which Madame de Montausier made upon the sensitive mind of the future poet must have been vivid (although it was not destined for permanency) since her influence over his feelings, during the short period of their acquaintance, had the effect of making Wycherley renounce the reformed faith, in which he had been educated, and embrace the religion of the Church of Rome. His conversion, however, seems to have been little more than

* The materials of this life are chiefly derived from some of the biographical works already cited as authorities in this volume, and from major Park's Memoirs of Wycherley, Dennis's Letters, Spence's Anecdotes, Malone's Dryden, &c.

a fugitive sentiment. His imagination, but not his understanding, was affected by the brilliant conversation of Madame de Montausier ; and, upon his return to England, a little before the Restoration of Charles II., he became reconciled to the Protestant religion by the more calm reasoning of Dr. Barlow, to whom Wood ascribes the merit of having reconverted him. In July, 1660, he became a fellow-commoner of Queen's College, Oxford, where he lived in the provost's lodgings, and his name was entered in the public library, under the title of *Philosophiæ Studiosus.* He left the university, however, without taking his degree ; and, following the natural turn of his inclinations, to which his residence in the gay coteries on the banks of the Charante had probably given a tone of levity, came up to London, and entered himself in the Middle Temple. From the dull and technical studies of the law he was speedily diverted, as might be expected, by the pleasures of a town life, which, in that age, were characterised by a greater degree of profligacy than existed at any previous or subsequent period. With the Restoration came in a taste for voluptuous vices, that entirely accorded with the genius of Wycherley. The stage was the mirror of the excesses, the humours, and the gallantries of the court ; and to the stage he was easily tempted to dedicate his talents, as the shortest road to distinction.

Dryden was then in full possession of the stage : but his frequent quarrels with contemporary authors, especially with Elkanah Settle and Shadwell, his plagiarisms from Shakspeare, and his defence of them, which was still worse *, his religious opinions, against which the

* Dryden's comedy of *The Wild Gallant*, produced in 1663, was nearly fatal to the author's fame Langbaine asserts that the plot is not original, although he allows that Dryden improved what he stole. The instances of Dryden's plagiarisms are as numerous as his attempts to justify them by quoting the examples of his predecessors were bold His *Sir Martin Marall*, 1668, is borrowed from a variety of sources Whole passages are taken from Quinault's *L'Amant Indiscret*, Molière's *L'Etourdi*, and *Marmion*, and an entire song from Voiture. But this was the least part of his literary delinquency. There appears to be no doubt that the play was actually written by the duke of Newcastle during his residence in France, and in-

tide of popularity was, just then, running fresh and strong, and the disgraceful servility of his writings, exposed his reputation to so many shocks, that the moment was favourable for the appearance of an author, whose invention, sprightliness, and originality, could not fail, at any time, in carrying off a large share of public favour. Besides these accidental advantages, derived from the uneasy eminence held by Dryden, the productions of Wycherley presented the attractions which always belong to brilliant and striking novelty. His comedies may be said to have created a new era in the drama.

His first piece, entitled *Love in a Wood, or St. James's Park,* was produced at the Theatre Royal in 1672; and, although it is undoubtedly the worst of his productions, yet it was so favourably received, that it had a run in its first season, and was the means of introducing the author at once, not only to the notice of the public, but to the acquaintance of some of the most distinguished wits and beauties of the day. The comedy itself is poor and feeble, and does not contain a single passage from which the wit that Wycherley afterwards displayed in his writings could be reasonably predicated; and it is chiefly memorable for its connection with an incident in the life of the poet, which mainly helped to advance his fortunes, and which affords us a remarkable illustration of the laxity that prevailed in the manners of the court ladies in the reign of Charles II. The following are the particulars of the circumstance to which we refer:— A few days after the play was produced, Wycherley was driving in his chariot through Pall Mall, towards St. James's, when the chariot of the beautiful but licen-

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trusted by him to the hands of Dryden, who afterwards brought it out as his own. When he was charged with having copied Shakspeare in other pieces, particularly in *All for Love*, he retorted by saying, that Fletcher and Suckling had done the same before him; that Shakspeare's plays were all to be found in the hundred novels of Cinthio (which was a pure fabrication), that Fletcher, who, he asserted, knew nothing of plotting, founded his pieces on Spanish stories; and that Ben Jonson borrowed as freely from the ancients!

tious duchess of Cleveland came up, and, as it passed, her ladyship, thrusting her body, says Dennis, half out, addressed the poet abruptly with—" You, Wycherley, you are the son of a ——;" her face all the time radiant with laughter. Wycherley was so taken by surprise that, for a few moments, he was utterly confounded; but at last he detected in the words of the duchess an allusion to a passage in one of the songs of his comedy. Rapidly recovering his self-possession, he ordered his coachman to drive after her ladyship's carriage; and, as soon as he overtook it, he addressed her with an air of consummate gallantry,—" Madam," said Wycherley, " you have been pleased to bestow a title on me which belongs only to the fortunate. Will your ladyship be at the play to-night?" The duchess, determined to see the frolic to its conclusion, but still coquetting with inimitable *sang-froid*, replied, " Well, what if I am there?" " Why, then," answered Wycherley, " I will be there to wait on your ladyship, though I disappoint a fine woman, who has made me an assignation." The poet, it seems, had already acquired an intimate knowledge of the ways of the heart of a fashionable woman; and with intuitive skill had hit upon the very best method in the world to ingratiate himself in her favour. " So!" exclaimed the lady, " you are sure to disappoint a woman who has favoured you, for one who has not?" " Yes," he replied, " if the one who has not favoured me is the finer woman of the two. But he, who will be constant to your ladyship until he can find a finer, is sure to die your captive." With this exquisitely turned compliment they separated, the duchess covered with blushes, and secretly resolved to go to the play, and Wycherley exulting in the prospect of a conquest from which he anticipated greater celebrity than from the highest triumphs the stage could confer. Nor did he miscalculate upon the results. The duchess appeared that evening in the first row of the king's box at Drury-lane, and Mr. Wycherley occupied a place in the pit immediately below her. The interchanges that

took place between them on that occasion gradually ripened into intimacy, and led to a correspondence which afterwards became a topic of general conversation. George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, who was cousin-german to the lady, had long paid his addresses to her in vain, and had at length been dismissed, after repeated solicitations and importunities. The elevated rank and influential position of the court favourite rendered him a formidable enemy; and it no sooner became known that Wycherley was entertained by her grace, than the disappointed duke resolved to take his revenge by publicly defaming them both. He placed spies round her house, who gave him an accurate account of all her visiters; and discovering that Wycherley was the most frequent and constant of her guests, he did not fail to speak of the poet contemptuously every where he went. The young dramatist, whose prospects depended mainly on the patronage of the court, became alarmed by the enmity of so powerful a foe; and, fearing that a report of his connection with the duchess of Cleveland (the nature of which does not admit of any doubt) might reach the ears of the king, and thus destroy his hopes for ever, left no means untried of conciliating the good opinion of the duke of Buckingham. He accordingly applied to his friends, the witty Rochester and his associate, sir Charles Sedley, to entreat their mediation on his behalf, begging of them to represent to the duke the mischief he was likely to do to one who was personally unknown to him, and who was not conscious of having, upon any occasion, given him cause for offence. The duke heard their remonstrances with his usual urbanity, merely observing, that he did not blame Wycherley, and only accused his cousin. Ay, replied they, but by rendering him suspected of such an intrigue, you are about to ruin him; that is, your grace is about to ruin a man with whose conversation you would be pleased above all things: and then enlarging upon Wycherley's wit and social accomplishments, they so successfully excited the curiosity of the duke to make his acquaintance, that he

desired them to bring Wycherley to sup with him, which they did in a few nights; and the duke was so charmed by his sportive and agreeable manner, and the gaiety of his style, that he exclaimed, with an asseveration, "My cousin is in the right of it!" and from that moment became the warm friend and patron of the man whom he had previously regarded with the hatred of a defeated rival. From the friendship that was thus strangely formed may be dated the whole of the subsequent prosperity of Wycherley.

Our author now mixed largely with the most brilliant wits of the court, and speedily acquired a fashionable reputation for his gallantries and lively sallies in private, which assisted him to success even more usefully than his literary fame, which, it must be confessed, he did not take much pains to improve. A year elapsed before he brought out his next comedy, called *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, which was acted at the Duke's theatre with considerable applause. This play sparkles with wit; but, being founded for the most part in fugitive manners, and being deficient in the more durable elements of nature, its popularity ceased with the age in which its points and allusions were familiar to the audience. Five years now intervened before Wycherley again appeared as a dramatist. The stage, during this period, was supplied with novelties by other writers, who, not sufficiently important to command separate biographies, may here be referred to individually, to illustrate the condition and progress of the drama in the seventeenth century.

Dryden, Otway, Lee, and Shadwell were the leading dramatic poets of that period. But, as they will be found distinctly treated elsewhere, we must confine our present notices to writers of minor note.* Of these the most prominent were sir Charles Sedley,

* Dryden properly comes under consideration in the section of this work devoted to the lives of the English poets, which will explain the omission of his biography in the present volume.

sir George Etherege, Settle, Durfey, Crowne, Tate, Banks, and Ravenscroft. A rapid review of the lives and productions of each of these authors will enable us to present a continuous view of the stage during the reign of Charles II. and a few subsequent years.

Sir Charles Sedley was the grandson of sir William Sedley, who founded the Sedleian lectureship of natural philosophy at Oxford, and son of sir John Sedley, of Aylesford, in Kent. He was born about the year 1639, was educated at a grammar-school, and was entered as a fellow-commoner at Wadham College, Oxford, in 1655-6. Like Wycherley he quitted the university without taking out his degree; and being out of humour with the existing government, he lived retired in the country, until the festivities of the Restoration carried him to London, where, being introduced to the king, his felicitous talents found a sphere well adapted for their display. He soon obtained a distinguished place in the friendship of the licentious monarch. His exquisite air and fascinating conversation gave such a zest to the loose pleasures of the court, that he quickly distanced all his rivals in the royal favour. Even the intriguing and parasitical wits, who were most wounded by his triumphs in this way, could not avoid bearing testimony to his merits. We must look for the minor history of the poetry of that age to the occasional scandal-verses of the day—such for instance as the poems of Rochester, who treated friend and foe with a tolerably equal measure of ridicule and ribaldry; and in such light and flippant sketches we find that Sedley was highly estimated by his contemporaries. Shadwell, whose authority is valuable only as that of one who had good opportunities of forming an opinion, said of him, that he had heard Sedley *speak* more wit at a supper than all his adversaries could *write* in a year; the duke of Buckingham described his amorous trifles as "Sedley's witchcraft;" and Rochester, in his poem entitled, *An Allusion to the Tenth Satire of the First Book of Horace*, panegyrises Sedley for his "prevailing

gentle art," and "nice way of wit," which, he says, Dryden attempted in vain. Sedley's reputation was chiefly raised upon his remarkable social powers and his amatory poems, the entire charm of which consisted in the delicacy with which they insinuated the most depraved and immoral images. He seems to have shed a grace upon the worst vices of the day, which only served to render them more insidious and dangerous. The levity of his writings communicated its infection to his actions; and, like Rochester, he was not ashamed to put into practice the profligacy he preached. It is difficult to believe that gentlemen of rank and fashion, at the head, not only of the most aristocratic circles but of the literary coteries, distinguished alike by station and ability, could have descended to the dissolute excesses in which Sedley and his companions indulged, in open contempt of the public morals. But the example, unfortunately, was derived from so high a quarter, that the upper ranks of society, whose habits are too often conventional upon the usages of the court, did not regard those criminalities with the censure they deserved. The middle and lower classes alone appear to have cherished that sense of decorum and virtue which was abandoned by the monarch and the nobility. An emphatic proof of this fact was afforded by the issue of an adventure in which Sedley made a conspicuous figure.

In June 1663, the lord Buckhurst, sir Thomas Ogle, and sir Charles Sedley, after a debauch at a tavern in Bow-street Covent Garden, being inflamed with wine, went out upon the balcony in front of the house, and amused themselves by shocking the modesty of the street passengers with a variety of indecent attitudes; but Sedley, not content with this outrage, stripped off his clothes, and in that state delivered a speech to the mob, which is described as being full of gross and scandalous illusions. This last act worked the crowd into a frenzy, a riot ensued, Sedley and his friends were forced to make their retreat, the house was violently assailed, the win-

dows were broken, and worse consequences must have ensued but for the vigorous opposition with which the assaults of the enraged multitude were met from within. The affair, however, obtained so much notoriety, that the local authorities were compelled to notice it; the offenders were indicted, cited before a court of justice in Westminster, and heavily fined. Sedley was sentenced to pay a penalty of *500l.* The odium which he incurred by this frolic worked a complete revolution in his nature. From that moment he became an altered man. The libertine, suddenly but effectually reformed, renounced his vices; and, entering parliament, dedicated himself seriously to business. The unconstitutional proceedings of James II., who had ascended the throne in the interim, opened a wide field for the display of eloquence and patriotism; and Sedley in the commons, and the earl of Dorset in the lords, led the opposition to the king's demand for a standing army with such effect, that his majesty was compelled to escape from the difficulty in which he was placed by abruptly dissolving the parliament. Sedley followed up his resistance to the measure of the king by taking an active part in bringing about the revolution; but his conduct upon this occasion is not quite free from suspicion. However clear his political principles may have been, there is no doubt that he was also strongly actuated by personal motives in the hostility he evinced to James, who had frequently conferred favours upon him. The king had dishonoured his daughter; and, to make amends, had crea'ed her countess of Dorchester, an elevation which Sedley resented, as being calculated only to render her infamy the more conspicuous. Out of this circumstance sprang that hatred of the king which marked the whole course of Sedley's subsequent conduct in parliament. He is recorded to have given this witty reason for the activity with which he laboured to advance the revolution. "I hate ingratitude," he observed, "and therefore, as the king has made my daughter a countess, I will endeavour to make his daughter a queen," alluding to the princess

Mary, who was married to the prince of Orange. The countess of Dorchester is said to have been a coarse and impudent woman. The earl of Dorset wrote two lampoons upon her, in one of which he ridicules her fierce wit, and adds: —

> "Love is a calmer, gentler joy,
> Smooth are his looks and soft his face;
> Her Cupid is a black-guard boy,
> That runs his link full in your face."

and bishop Burnett furnishes an anecdote of a conspiracy among the priests, who were about the king's person, to remove her, because "she was bold and lively, and was always treating them and their proceedings with great contempt." *

Sir Charles survived the revolution many years, and sustained to the last his reputation as a fine gentleman, a gay companion, and a patron of poetry. He was mainly instrumental in bringing into notice the poems of Charles Montague, afterwards earl of Halifax. His dramatic productions were neither very numerous nor very successful. His comedy of *The Mulberry Garden* was the most popular of them all; but it is only just to refer its popularity to the fact that it was little more than an alteration of Molière's *Ecole des Maris*. *Anthony and Cleopatra*, an adaptation from Shakspeare, followed; but it was eclipsed by Dryden's *All for Love*. A comedy, called *Bellamira, or the Mistress*, the plot of which was taken from the *Eunuch* of Terence, was his next production; and, notwithstanding the high opinion that was expressed in private upon its merits, it had but a poor reception in the theatre. Sir George Etherege, to whom it was sent while he was residing in Germany, strongly recommended it, and said that he had read it over and

* Sedley was married early in life to a rich Roman catholic lady, by whom he had only this one daughter. Religious differences soon led to a separation between them, and they parted by mutual consent Miss Sedley was confided to the care of her mother, who educated her in her own religion, which led her into that connection, that terminated in her becoming the mistress of the king. Her daughter was afterwards duchess of Buckinghamshire.

over again with renewed pleasure. It is, perhaps, the best of Sedley's plays, especially as, the scene being laid in London, the author was enabled to render its wit subservient to local purposes. During the performance of *Bellamira* the roof of the playhouse fell in, which produced considerable alarm in the house; but fortunately Sedley, who was slightly bruised, was the only person who suffered any injury from the accident. This circumstance drew from his merry friend, sir Fleetwood Shepherd, the observation, that there was so much fire in his play that it blew up the poet, playhouse, and all. "No, no," replied Sedley, "the play was so heavy that it broke down the house, and buried the poet in the ruins." *Beauty, the Conqueror*, a tragedy, also founded on the story of Mark Anthony, *The Gambler*, a comedy, and *The Tyrant of Crete*, a tragedy, complete the list of our author's plays; but none of them have outlived the time of their production. Sir Charles Sedley's works, consisting of poems, plays, and speeches, were published in 1722, in two volumes, edited by Mr. Ayliff. According to some authorities, sir Charles died on the 20th of August, 1701; other biographers assert that the date is doubtful, and that he probably lived some fifteen or sixteen years longer.

One of the most distinguished wits and dissolute gentlemen, which appear to have been almost identical characters, of this period, was the celebrated George Etherege. Descended from an ancient family in Oxfordshire, this gentleman was born in the neighbourhood of London about 1636. There is nothing known of his circumstances or education, except that he studied at Cambridge, travelled in Germany and France, and, returning to England, entered one of the inns of court, where he applied himself diligently, for a short time, to a course of legal reading. But his disposition unfitted him to prosecute such pursuits with credit or advantage, and speedily forsaking the law, he went freely into company, enjoyed at the height of his volatile spirit the dissipated pleasures of the town, and

rapidly acquiring a reputation for gallantry and taste in the gay circles, he glided, by a natural progress, to the stage, which was ready to receive every man, who, like Etherege, promised fair to establish a fashionable notóriety.

His first production was a comedy called *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub*, which was produced at the Duke of York's theatre in 1669. The piece succeeded, although looking back upon it at this distance of time, it is not easy to conceive the sort of audience that could, at any period, have entirely approved either of its libertinism or its incongruities. One part of it is written in serious heroic verse, and the remainder in loose prose. The former part is as dull as the latter is humorous and flippant; and we suppose that in the representation, the cumbrous dialogue was endured for the sake of the edge it gave to the grossness of the comic scenes. The comedy, however, answered the author's purpose: it procured him the acquaintance of the leading profligates, facilitated his passage to court, and conferred upon him the envious distinction of being considered one of the licensers of other men's fame. He became at once associated with Villiers, Rochester, Scroop, Sedley, and the group of wits who gave the tone to the manners of society; and he was soon regarded as one of the most accomplished amongst them in consequence of a certain air of refinement for which he was remarkable, and which few of his friends cared to cultivate. But it was necessary to maintain his position by further proofs of his poetical genius, and accordingly he produced in 1668 his play of *She would if She could,* one of the best comedies of that age. Shadwell pronounced this play to be the most perfect drama that had been produced from the reformation of the stage up to that time; yet, we have Dennis's authority for the fact that it was ill received by the audience in the first instance. He says that "on its first appearance, it was barbarously treated." Its merits, however, seem to have carried it tri-

umphantly through this unexplained opposition; and it was esteemed so highly at a later period, as to be revived with success at Covent-garden in 1750. That *She would if She could,* is steeped from the first scene to the last in a flood of levity, is true; but there is a sort of ambiguous grace in the way in which Etherege manages his prurient plots and lascivious dialogues, which, while it unquestionably renders them more dangerous by investing them with the most captivating charms of language and affecting touches of tenderness, diminishes on the surface at least their most offensive qualities. The whole design of this comedy is objectionable in a moral point of view, and the tact with which it is written cannot be admitted as a palliation of its impurities. Sir Richard Steele gives us in the *Spectator** a criticism upon it, which is remarkable no less for its justice than its severity. "This expedient," he observes, referring to the licentious descriptions with which it abounds, "to supply the deficiency of wit, has been used more or less by most of the authors who have succeeded on the stage, though I know but one who has professedly writ a play upon the basis of the desire to multiply our species, and that is the polite sir George Etherege; if I understand what the lady would be at, in the play called *She would if She could.* Other poets have here and there given an intimation that there is this design under all the disguises and affectations which a lady may put on; but no author, except this, has made sure work of it, and put the imaginations of the audience upon this one purpose from the beginning to the end of the comedy. It has always fared accordingly; for whether it be, that all who go to this piece would if they could, or that the innocents go to it to guess only what she would if she could, the play has been always well received." These

* No. LI. A paper full of witty censures upon the comedies of the latter part of the seventeenth century, and the beginning of the eighteenth century.

observations are strictly true in reference to the comedy under consideration; but sir Richard has committed rather a strange oversight in asserting that no other author had offended in the same way. Are there none of the comedies of Vanbrugh or Congreve to which these remarks would apply with equal force and propriety?

The dissipated life which Etherege led made him an idle servant of the Muses. He had by this time got into a service, which, it would seem, was better suited to his indolent habits—that of the beautiful Mary of Modena, the second duchess of York.

The voluptuous tastes of Etherege, who was practically as licentious in his conduct, as he was sentimentally immoral in his plays, were too much occupied by the intercourse that grew out of this fortunate appointment, to permit him to dedicate more than an occasional leisure, and, perhaps, languid moment to poetry. His time was passed in a round of unbridled pleasures, and, being a man of highly polished manners, and of a handsome figure and countenance, before his riotous living had inflicted irreparable injuries upon his constitution, his society was universally sought after. Under such temptations for wasting his hours, it is not very surprising that this gay courtier should have been but a scanty writer. Eight years elapsed after the production of the last piece, before he completed another, his last, for the stage. *The Man of Mode, or, Sir Fopling Flutter*, the most careful of his plays, was performed for the first time at the Duke's Theatre, in 1676, and was received with enthusiasm. There is more real nature in this play than in either of the former. It is said that three of the characters were drawn from life, in the flattering spirit of the portrait painter, who heightens the best features, and subdues the worst. Thus Dorimant, the representative of the rakish fine gentleman of that age, was designed for lord Rochester, concealing his vices and foibles, and

exaggerating his merits*; sir Fopling Flutter, the superlative coxcomb of his own age, and the progenitor of the whole race of stage *petits maitres* that have succeeded, was a sort of free portrait of Beau Hewitt; and young Bellair, according to the tradition, Etherege intended as a reflection of himself. This play presents a very admirable picture—perhaps the best extant—of the qualities that were held to constitute the fine gentlemen, fops, and wits, of Etherege's day. The portraits, no doubt, are accurate; and the reception which the audience gave to the comedy, may be accepted as the popular acknowledgement of its fidelity to existing traits and manners. But what a state of society must that have been in which such principles were adopted, and such abandoned courses were followed by men occupying influential positions in the world of fashion. The fine gentleman of the piece is so sunk in the lowest depths of debauchery, that his expressions are frequently revoltingly coarse and vulgar, and his actions are invariably dishonourable. Steele describes him as a "direct knave in his designs, and a clown in his language."† Its finery is a wretched glitter of affectation, and the vivacity is unmitigated heartlessness. The fop, alone, is a creature who keeps to his part with a consistency that is not disagreeable, because we expect to find him a fool, and we are not disappointed. "This whole celebrated piece," says Steele, who, without being a much better moralist himself, seems to have made war upon that licentiousness of which Etherege was one of the apostles, "is a perfect contradiction to good manners, good sense, and common honesty; and as there is nothing in it but what

* The best criticism, perhaps, that ever was written on Rochester's poetry, is contained in the following passage from Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Poets*:—"Rochester's poetry is the poetry of wit, combined with the love of pleasure, of thought with licentiousness His extravagant heedless levity has a sort of passionate enthusiasm in it; his contempt for every thing that others respect almost amounts to sublimity. His poem on *Nothing* is itself a great work. His epigrams were the bitterest, the least laboured, and the truest that ever were written."

† *Spectator*, No. LXV. Which see for an able analysis of this comedy.

is built upon the ruin of virtue and innocence, according to the notion of merit in this comedy, I take the shoemaker to be in reality the fine gentleman of the play; for it seems he is an atheist, if we may depend upon his character as given by the orange-woman, who is herself far from being the lowest."

The same lively critic concludes his observations with a still more emphatic censure: "To speak plainly of this whole work, I think nothing but being lost to a sense of innocence and virtue can make any one see this comedy, without observing more frequent occasion to move sorrow and indignation than mirth and laughter. At the same time I allow it to be nature, but it is nature in its utmost corruption and degeneracy." The comedy, however, has not been without defenders, and among the rest lord Orford, who speaks of it as follows: "The *Man of Mode* shines as our first genteel comedy; the touches are natural and delicate, and never overcharged. Unfortunately, the tone of the most fashionable people was extremely indelicate; and when Addison* in the *Spectator* anathematised this play, he forgot that it was rather a satire on the manners of the court, than an apology for them. Less licentious conversation would not have painted the age." This criticism of lord Orford is more good-natured than judicious, for whatever justification there might be offered for satirising the vices of the court, it is quite impossible to extend it to a play in which those vices are presented upon the stage in the most fascinating dress, and palliated by the wit of the characters instead of being held up to scorn and disgrace. Etherege certainly never meant to satirise, as lord Orford imagines, these excesses in which he so deeply indulged himself.

It has been truly observed of Etherege's plays, that they are lively conversation pieces, with little either of comic humour or of plot. Their dissolute frivolity has long banished them from the stage, and they are now

* His lordship is here in error. It was Steele, not Addison, who wrote the paper in the *Spectator*, to which he alludes.

wholly worthless except as memorials of an era remarkable for its vices.

Etherege's own life was an epitome of the period in which he lived. Having exhausted his fortune, and broken down his health in the pursuit of follies and vanities — a gambler, a rake, a wit, and a fine gentleman — he at last thought of repairing his circumstances by a design which would have aptly fallen into the plot of one of his own comedies—a marriage, in the decline of his powers, with a rich old widow. The lady, however, refused to accept his hand, which was all he had to offer, unless he could also confer a title upon her; and, accordingly, making good use of his interest at court, he succeeded in procuring the honour of knighthood. It does not appear that this union was productive of any issue; but the poet had a daughter by Mrs. Barry, upon whom he settled a small fortune of five or six thousand pounds, which the girl did not live to inherit. Soon after the accession of James II., Sir George Etherege obtained, through the constant kindness of the duchess of York, an appointment as ambassador to Hamburgh, and afterwards as envoy to Ratisbon. He did not survive these honours long, but the exact period of his death has not been ascertained. According to some writers he accompanied king James to France after the revolution, and died there; but, according to others, he came by a sudden death at Ratisbon, where, having entertained some friends liberally at dinner, and drank too much wine, as was his custom, in his eagerness to show them civility on their departure, he went forward to accompany them to the door, but, being flushed and unsteady, tumbled down the stairs and broke his neck.

All his contemporaries agree in describing Etherege to have been a courteous and generous man, and have conferred upon him, by common consent, the epithet of "refined Etherege," which was originally employed by Rochester. His real character appears felicitously in

a couple of letters he addressed to Buckingham from Ratisbon *, and in his light pieces of poetry, songs, lampoons, and love verses, where this spirit of refinement will be found dedicated to those loose and immoral objects that occupied the life of the poet.

Elkanah Settle occupies a prominent place in the literary annals of the reign of Charles II., less by the force of his talents, than by the immortality which his quarrels with Dryden have conferred upon his name. He was literally set up by the wits of the day to oppose Dryden; and although the inequality of the contest exposed him to a great deal of ridicule, of which he alone seemed to be unconscious, he very often seemed to get the better of his waspish and ill-natured opponent. He was born in 1648 at Dunstable, in Bedfordshire; and at eighteen years of age was entered a commoner of Trinity College, Oxford. Leaving the university before he obtained a degree, which seems to have been the ordinary practice of the incipient wits in that age, he appeared in London in the double capacity of poet and political essayist. His first step in life was to advocate the whig party; but he soon afterwards abandoned them for the tories. It seems that he was equally violent on both sides. In 1680, while he was yet a whig, so fierce was his zeal, that he was selected to undertake the management of the pope-burning ceremony on the 17th of November; and when he became a tory, his hostility to his former friends was so furious, that he became for a time a trooper in king James's army on Hounslow Heath. This extravagant conversion only brought down upon him the contempt of both parties. Despising him heartily for his want of principle, but discovering in his readiness and facility a cheap instrument to forward their ends, they employed his talents, which he was willing enough to let out to hire, as it suited their purposes. When they had done with him, they consigned him to destitution. He set up a weekly journal in defence of the administration; but its base

* See Biog. Brit.

servility neither provoked opponents, nor propitiated friends.

The only substantial reward Settle received for his multifarious labours, was a small pension from the city, which he enjoyed for several years, for the production of an annual panegyric or pageant in honour of the inauguration of the lord mayor. Of these pieces of fulsome flattery the entries of ten are preserved in the catalogues; but that is all that is ever likely to be known about them. These obsolete spectacles of prætorian grandeur may be traced as far back as the year 1236, when Eleanor, Henry the Third's queen, rode through the city to her coronation. The pageants were generally in the dramatic form, and consisted chiefly of personifications of the city of London, of old father Thames, commerce, the several companies, &c., intermixed in the old barbaric style, with a full court of heathen gods and goddesses, cornucopias, tridents, thunderbolts, and the signs of the zodiac. Great magnificence was lavished upon these ridiculous shows, which were not confined to the inauguration of his worship the mayor, but were resorted to whenever any great event called up the loyalty and poetical enthusiasm of the worthy citizens. The last pageant, which was written by Settle, took place in the year 1707; and in the following year, the piece he prepared was suppressed on account of the death of prince George of Denmark. From that time the pageants were altogether discontinued. In a poem of Rochester's, entitled *A Trial of the Poets for Bays*, that is, for the office of city poet, which the luckless Elkanah afterwards held, we have a satirical sketch of most of the pretenders of the day, and of Settle himself amongst the rest. Thus he disposes of the claims of Elkanah:

> "Poor Settle, his trial was the next come about,
> He brought him an 'Ibrahim,' with the preface torn out;
> And humbly desired he might give no offence;
> D——n him, cries Shadwell, he cannot write sense."

The *Ibrahim* alluded to here was a tragedy, in heroic verse, produced by Settle at the Duke's theatre in 1677, —a preposterous production; the plot of which was taken from Scudery's romance, and the scene laid in the seraglio. Rochester had evidently a very poor opinion of Settle, even when he came to speak of him seriously; for we find him elsewhere denying that he possessed even that sort of talent

> "That can divert the rabble and the court,
> Which blustering Settle never could obtain."

But of such men as Etherege, who unquestionably was one of the most refined wits of his time, and Wycherley, the satirist speaks in terms of unmixed eulogy. He says of Etherege, that

> "Of all men that writ,
> There's none had more fancy, sense, judgment, and wit."

And he only blames him for his idleness; while Wycherley he thought was too accomplished a gentleman to be sunk in such an office as that of city laureate: he was in fact "too good for the place."

> "No gentleman-writer that office should bear;
> But a trader in wit the laurel should wear,
> As none but a cit e'er makes a lord-mayor."

Settle's attempts as a dramatic writer would, probably, be now altogether forgotten, or might not have even been persevered in, but for the accidents that threw him into collision with Dryden, and invested him with a temporary interest which his own merits never could have otherwise created. His love of notoriety carried him through the conflict with a bravery beyond the height of his genius; and as Dryden's coarse and intemperate criticisms were open to obvious censure, Settle occasionally triumphed over him by assailing his weak points with vigorous resolution. The best part of the controversies between them consisted in the tact with which Settle imitated in his rejoinder the bombastic violence of his opponent.

The origin of the disputes appears to have been the production of a tragedy by Settle, written in rhyme, and called *The Empress of Morocco*. Whether it was that this piece was written in rhyme, a practice which Dryden had previously adopted and somewhat fiercely defended, but which presented difficulties that he might be jealous of seeing others overcome as well as himself, or whether it was that his ire was excited by the success which attended the production of the tragedy, cannot now be determined. But, whatever might have been the cause, his indignation and rage was unbounded. *The Empress of Morocco* had not only been successful on the stage, but was patronised at court, and actually presented at Whitehall by the lords and ladies of the bedchamber. This was enough to provoke the malignant criticism of Dryden, who feared no doubt in the new court favourite a dangerous rival. But Settle, not satisfied with the honours which had been already showered upon his production published it with a set of cuts, the first that had ever been attached to a play, and a preface breathing the most courageous defiance of his adversary. This stretch of impudence, as Dryden regarded it, inflamed the angry poet beyond endurance; and in the fury of jealousy, which was at the bottom of it all, he wrote an invective that brought the matter to a personal issue at once. His character of Settle is no less remarkable for scurrility than injustice. "He's an animal," he observed, "of a most deplored understanding, without reading and conversation. His being is in a twilight of sense, and some glimmering of thought, which he never can fashion into wit or English. His style is boisterous and rough-hewn, his rhyme incorrigibly bad, and his numbers perpetually harsh and ill-sounding. The little talent which he has is fancy. He sometimes labours with a thought; but, with the pudder he makes to bring it into the world, 'tis commonly still-born; so that, for want of learning and elocution, he will never be able to express any thing either naturally or prettily." Now this was sheer malice; for, with all

Settle's deficiencies, want of learning, such as is here ascribed to him, certainly was not one of them. But Dryden carried his revenge still further. He anatomised Settle's tragedy line by line; and, by a very disingenuous mode of verbal criticism, turned the whole dialogue into nonsense. But this was a method of attack that was equally available to both; and accordingly Settle retorted on him in a pamphlet of ninety-four quarto pages, in which he proved that the weapons of ridicule, at all events, are not a test either of truth or poetry. This contest drew Settle suddenly into notice. The earl of Rochester had previously taken him under his protection for the sole purpose of injuring the reputation of Dryden; but with his usual caprice and insincerity, Settle had no sooner won his way to Whitehall, than his lordship withdrew his patronage, apparently resolved, says one of his biographers, "to have a judgment contrary to that of the town," or perhaps, says Dr. Johnson, being unable to endure any reputation beyond a certain height, even when he had himself contributed to raise it.

Upon the publication of the *Absalom and Achitophel* of Dryden, Settle answered it in a piece called *Absalom Senior;* and again attacked Dryden's *Medal* in a rejoinder called *The Medal Reversed.* For these offences Dryden ridiculed and lashed him in the second part of *Absalom and Achitophel,* under the name of *Doeg.* While the feud lasted, Settle contrived to live by some means or another. His dramatic pieces, although none of them were very successful, with the exception of *The Empress of Morocco,* enabled him to exist; but even the rapid decline of his circumstances, and the gathering contempt of his contemporaries, could not subdue his factious nature. Soon after the production of a play, called *Love and Revenge,* in which he borrowed largely from the *Fatal Contract* of Hemmings, he attacked Shadwell, perhaps, with a view of indirectly soliciting the pardon and friendship of Dryden (for he was quite capable of such a meanness);

but Shadwell replied with spirit, and put an end to the controversy. Settle's dramatic talents were of the poorest order. He was utterly destitute of judgment in the selection of his plots, and exhibited still less merit in their treatment. The *Pastor Fido* of Guarini, *The History of Pope Joan*, *The Conquest of China*, and other equally impracticable subjects, furnished him with the materials of most of his plays. The failure of such subjects in such hands was inevitable. The struggles of his life must have been deplorable; since, amongst other acts of political venality, he had recourse to a panegyric on the virtues of judge Jefferies, in a desperate hope of earning a subsistence through his patronage. The sequel of his career conveys a melancholy moral. After trying the legitimate stage in vain, and addressing himself fruitlessly both to whigs and tories he dropped down to the lowest grade of society, and was so reduced as to become a writer of drolls for the booths in Bartholomew and Southwark fairs, kept by Mrs. Minns and her daughter, Mrs. Leigh, from whom he received a wretched stipend. He was also obliged to appear as a performer in their exhibitions; and in a piece, called *St. George for England*, he acted the part of a dragon, dressed in a case of green leather of his own invention! Poverty and disease, however, soon pressed him still harder; and the man upon whose stone, says Dr. Johnson, might with truth have been inscribed,

"Here lies the Rival and Antagonist of Dryden,"

died in the Charter House on the 12th February, 1723-4. Of his personal appearance, we have this brief account in *The Briton*, published soon after his death: — "He was a man of tall stature, red face, short black hair, lived in the city, and had a numerous poetical issue, but shared the misfortune of several other gentlemen, to survive them all."

Thomas D'Urfey, more familiarly known through the sallies of his contemporaries, under the name Tom Durfey, was descended from the ancient French family

of the counts D'Urfe. Being Hugonots, they fled from Rochelle at the time of the siege in 1628, and settled at Exeter, where the poet was born. He was originally designed for the bar; but an impediment in his speech, as well as his own inclinations, led him to abandon that profession and devote himself to the writing of songs and plays; in the former of which he acquired considerable reputation. He had a lively and satirical turn for irregular odes and facetious songs; and is said to have sung his own compositions with rich humour; and to have had such a flow of vivacity in his conversation, that he was a welcome guest at the tables of most of the nobility. Charles II., whenever he stepped out of the ceremonials of the court, frequently diverted himself with Tom's jests; and a writer in *The Guardian*, who gives a very pleasant account of the poet, observes, that he remembers having seen the king lean on Tom's shoulder more than once, humming a song with him. Even king William, who was of a more cold and saturnine temper, is said to have sent for him one night, and was so pleased with his singing, that he ordered him a present. Queen Anne also was so much delighted with a song he wrote in ridicule of the princess Sophia, electress dowager of Hanover, beginning with

> "The crown is too weighty
> For shoulders of eighty,"

that she ordered him a gift of fifty guineas. Queen Caroline, when she was princess, commanded him to be presented to her at Richmond; and was pleased to express much gratification at his entertaining anecdotes of the previous reigns under which he had lived. His social qualities appear to have contributed largely to the fame he enjoyed during his lifetime; and it is said, that he was so popular in the London circles, that many an honest country gentleman obtained *eclât* at home, by pretending to have been in his company. He published a volume of poems, satires, and songs, in 1690, which

are only remarkable for their obscenity; and in the same year a burlesque poem, called *Collin's Walk through London.* A volume of tales, serious and comic, he also gave to the press in 1699; and in 1718, a collection of songs in four volumes, called *Wit and Mirth*, or, *Pills to Purge Melancholy,* of which Addison speaks in very favourable terms, being moved, however, at the time by a benevolent desire to render the author a service, as he was then in great distress. To use his own words, Durfey, "after having written more odes than Horace, and about four times as many comedies as Terence, found himself reduced to great difficulties by the importunities of a set of men, who of late years had furnished him with the accommodations of life, and would not, as we say, be paid with a song." In 1719 a large collection of Durfey's ballads, sonnets, and songs, was published in six volumes; and in 1721 he published another volume of poems, operas, and stories, containing also a tragedy, and a piece called *The Two Queens of Brentford*, which is not destitute of amusing qualities, and which is intended as a continuation of the *Rehearsal.* Durfey's life, during the time when he was in such request with the volatile aristocracy, has been graphically described in the following lines, taken from a song, that was written in ridicule of his gay dining-out habits and domestic penury.

> " He prates like a parrot:
> He sups with the Duke;
> And he lives in a garret."

Durfey wrote no less than thirty-two plays; but they have all passed away, nor is there one of them that is worthy of being resuscitated. Langbaine accuses him, with justice, of being an inordinate plagiarist; and Collier, in his *View of the Profaness of the Stage,* assails him fiercely for the indecencies of the three comedies he founded upon the romance of Don Quixote. These charges would apply with equal truth to the rest

of his works. The libertinism and scurrility of his writings are so rarely relieved by a refined wit, that they exhibit depravity of mind, rather than a sportive or graceful fancy. Some of his songs alone possess the merit of liveliness, unalloyed by grossness; but even of these there are but a few that would now be likely to be received with applause by the public. His plays were generally successful on the stage. They were well adapted to the prevailing licentiousness, and are characterised by that indelicacy of sentiment, intricacy in the plot, rapidity of action, and bustling eccentricity which are calculated to excite the animal spirits of an audience, who are not very particular about stage morality. There was scarcely any dramatist of the time who hit off so truly the salient points of the age. Durfey wrote expressly for the reign of Charles II., and mirrored its worst traits, with greater fidelity than any of his contemporaries. Such pieces were not destined for permanency; and, like all the literature which was essentially imbued with the spirit of that period, they are no longer referred to except as illustrations of vanished manners.

Towards the end of his life, Durfey was plunged in difficulties, and compelled to apply to the managers of the playhouse to give him a benefit, which they agreed to do, acting, on that occasion, a comedy of his own, called *The Fond Husband; or The Plotting Sisters*. The result is conjectured to have been favourable, as he subsequently appears to have lived and written with his usual ease and good-humour. He died in February 1723, at an advanced age, and was buried in St. James's churchyard, Westminster; where a stone, simply inscribed with his name, marks his grave.

John Crowne was the son of an American dissenting minister, and was born in Nova Scotia. His education was scarcely completed, when, sick of the formal and rigid character of the people, he resolved to seek his fortunes in England. Being wholly friendless in this country, his necessities at first compelled him to accept

the humiliating situation of gentleman usher to an old lady of rank; but, soon wearied of his office, he threw it up, and became a writer for the stage. Here his efforts were rewarded with such brilliant success, that the earl of Rochester, who suffered no opportunity of mortifying Dryden to escape, took him under his patronage, and prevailed upon the queen to command him to furnish a masque for the court, to the exclusion of Dryden, who had hitherto possessed a monopoly in such productions. Crowne's masque was called *Calista,* and was founded on Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The scene was placed in Arcadia; and the intervals between the acts were filled up with songs. The brightest fortunes now, for a time, lay before the dramatist. He brought out two tragedies in rhyme, at the Theatre Royal, in 1677, entitled *The Destruction of Jerusalem,* which were attended with triumphant success; and Rochester was so chagrined at his good fortune—which, as we have already seen in the case of Settle, always had the effect of making him renounce the poets he protected—that he left no means untried of working his ruin at court. But Charles II. was too fond of his pleasures, and too much devoted to those who contributed to them, to be easily turned aside from their cultivation, so long as the mood lasted; and Rochester's insinuations about Crowne's birth and education were treated with indifference. The monarch continued to bestow favours upon the dramatist, whose easy and amiable disposition was not insensible to the kindness of his royal master. Crowne, in the fulness of his gratitude, joined the tory party, and attacked the whigs in an excellent lively comedy, called *The City Politiques.* There was some difficulty, however, in getting this play represented. The lord Arlington, who was then chamberlain, and secretly in the whig interest, refused to license it; nor was it produced upon the stage, until the king interposed to command its performance. The comedy was eminently successful; but the severity of the satire created a great many enemies. Crowne was

accused of caricaturing a distinguished sergeant-at-law, and his wife, and a member of the medical profession, in the characters *Bartolini, Lucinda*, and *Pauchy*; nor did an explanatory preface which he published, in which he vindicated himself against this accusation, make the matter any better. The result was that Crowne, borne down by persecution, applied to the king for an appointment that would relieve him from the precarious life of a writer for the stage; and his majesty promised to comply with his request, on condition that he would write one comedy, putting into his hands, at the same time, a Spanish novel, called *No puede ser,* for the purpose of furnishing the groundwork. According to Oldmixon, who says he had Crowne's authority for the fact, the comedy was founded upon two Spanish plays; but precision either way is not of much importance. From the materials suggested by his majesty, Crowne wrote his comedy of *Sir Courtly Nice,* the best, incomparably, of all his plays. It is said that he read the scenes to his majesty, one by one, as he wrote them; and that his majesty approved of them highly; objecting only that they were not sufficiently merry, or, perhaps we ought to say, licentious. Crowne, however, did not adopt his majesty's hint, and the comedy was acted as he originally wrote it. This piece has frequently been revived; for, although its main features were addressed to the fanaticism of the age, there is enough of general truth and nature in it to render it intelligible and agreeable at any time. Dennis praises it with enthusiasm :—"Though we find in it," he says, "neither the fine designs of Ben Jonson, nor the general and masculine wit of Wycherley, nor that grace, that delicacy, nor that courtly air, which make the charms of Etherege, yet the dialogue is so lively and so spirited, and so attractively diversified and adapted to the several characters," that he declares his opinion, that the greatest comic poet of any age might be proud of having been its author. The true merit of the comedy, and that, indeed, which enabled it to sur-

vive the rest of Crowne's dramas, is the force and contrast of its characters. *Surly* and *Nice*—the one carrying bluntness, and the other ceremony, to excess—*Testimony* and *Hothead*,—expressing the two hostile parties that their disturbed the peace of the country, and which, by a slight adaptation, might be made to fit the factions of our own times,—are admirably opposed and delineated. King Charles, unfortunately, did not live to see this play acted; and his death prevented the fulfilment of the promise he had given to the author. Poor Crowne was now suddenly consigned to obscurity, but he continued to labour for the stage, and produced six plays more. When and where he died is uncertain. Coxeter states that he was alive in 1703; and Jacob informs us, that he was buried at St. Giles-in-the-Fields. He wrote eighteen plays, most of which were highly successful: of these, the tragedies preponderate in number, but are inferior in excellence to the comedies. Crowne's forte lay in low humour, which he managed with more aptitude and dexterity, than any of his contemporaries. This quality is richly displayed in *The Country Wit*, which is an imitation, at a vast distance, of the *Sicilien* of Molière. But low humour is short-lived, and necessarily ephemeral. It represents nothing but the fleeting slang of the *canaille*; and, as soon as it ceases to be understood, the charm of its hilarity—presuming it to have such a charm—evaporates, leaving behind only the smirched frame, from which the rockets have been fired.

Rochester's character of Crowne is, of course, not to be relied upon; for, having turned round upon him so treacherously and capriciously, he sought to justify his enmity in unmeasured abuse. When, however, he ridicules his "tedious scenes," it may be presumed that he regarded him not so much as a writer of comedies as one who aimed at excellence in tragedy. Indeed, this seems to have been Crowne's weak point: he mistook the true bent of his genius; and, as Young says of Settle, misapplied his talents. Some vague

notion of Crowne may, with due abatement, be drawn from Rochester's unmerciful satire:—

> "In the numerous crowd that encompass'd him round,
> Little starch'd Johnny Crowne at his elbow he found;
> His cravat-string new iron'd, he gently did stretch
> His lily-white hand out, the laurel to reach."

Yet, notwithstanding this picture of coxcombry, Crowne is described as a man of a very kindly and easy nature, and of more virtue than the court could wholly corrupt.

Of a very different cast from any of these dramatists was Nahum Tate, whose name is perpetuated by his clumsy and maudlin attempts to adapt Shakspeare to the conventions of the stage, and his version of the Psalms in conjunction with Dr. Brady. Nahum was the son of Dr. Faithful Tate, and was born in Dublin in 1652. He received his education in Trinity College in that city, and soon afterwards came to England. It does not appear that he followed any profession; and, except the few incidents of his literary life, which are manifested in the production of ten dramatic pieces, including his adaptations, there is very little more known about him beyond the fact that he succeeded Shadwell in the laureateship, which he held until his death; that he died on the 12th of August, 1715, in the Mint, where he lived as a place of refuge against debt, by which it appears he was overwhelmed towards the end of his life, and that he was buried in St. George's Church. The frigid and pointless character of Tate's productions is well described by Pope, who speaks of him as a cold writer of no invention. He was the only dramatist of the day who seems to have lived apart from the bustle of the town, or rather to have been rejected from all communion with the wits. Dryden employed him in some of his translations; and was the only man of note who seems to have stooped from his gay circle to hold intercourse with him. But Dryden used him merely as a hack, the capacity in

which alone he appears to advantage, and for which his scholastic acquirements happily prepared him. Of all the plays he produced not one was original. They were all either compilations from other sources, or old plays remodelled.* Yet this author, utterly destitute of imagination and taste, a mere plodder and mechanic in literature, had the courage, not only to make extensive alterations in the *Lear* of Shakspeare, but to justify them boldly in print. He even went so far in his own defence as to describe the original as "a heap of jewels unstrung and unpolished," which he could not reduce to order by any other expedient than that of interpolating the text, not to speak of what he cut out of it. Thus, he not merely cut out the *Fool*, but introduced a love-plot between Edgar and Cordelia, which completely mars the touching simplicity of the story as it stood before. But this adaptation has held the stage ever since, to the exclusion of Shakspeare's tragedy, with the exception of an attempt, recently made at Covent Garden Theatre, to restore the pure text, the success of which, however, was not sufficiently decisive to warrant the hope of its repetition. Addison declared that, in his opinion, the play had lost half its beauty by Tate's alterations; but, as Dr. Johnson observes, the public in this instance decided in favour of Tate. Such a man is obviously out of place in the brilliant company of writers amongst whom we find him, but none of whom he resembled in any single quality of genius. Finding him there, however, it was necessary to speak of him. He is said, by one who knew him well, to have had a downcast look, and to have seldom had much to say for himself,—an account which realizes in his person the drowsy characteristics of his muse. Oldys alludes to him as being a "free, good-natured, and fuddling companion;" the fuddling companionship is probable enough, but the freedom and good-nature are at least apocryphal.

Of John Banks, who at this period wrote for the stage, and for one of whose plays Dryden wrote a pro-

logue and an epilogue, there is nothing known, but that he was an attorney-at-law, belonging to the society at New Inn, and that he wrote seven tragedies. These pieces were on the whole tolerably successful; but, with a single exception, none of them lived beyond the life-time of the author, and some of them died in the season of their production. His first play was called *The Rival Kings*; it is written, agreeably to that depraved taste of which Dryden had set the example, in rhyme, and the scene is laid in Babylon. The conduct of the plot exhibits some skill, but the dialogue is mere fustian. *The Destruction of Troy* followed in 1679. The story is derived from the Roman poets; but, notwithstanding some tact in its development, it met very indifferent success. Langbaine, speaks favourably of it, and thinks that it excels *The Iron Age* of Heywood — a stretch of praise which is quite as extravagant as some of the censures of the same critic. In 1682 Banks brought out the tragedy of *Virtue Betrayed*, in which the life of Anne Bullen is dramatized with strict adherence to historical truth. This play was received with distinguished approbation, and is said to have become a wonderful favourite with the ladies, who were deeply affected by the distresses of the heroine. It kept the stage until the death of Mrs. Oldfield, but has not been acted since. *The Island Queens*, founded on the Scotch and English histories, and embracing the death of Mary, queen of Scotland, was produced in 1684. At first its performance was prohibited, and Cibber tells us, that it had been offered to the stage twenty years before it was acted, but was rejected by the master of the revels, on account of some political allusions which he supposed it to contain Banks, however, made interest with queen Anne, through the interference of a nobleman at court, and succeeded in procuring permission to have the play presented. It was soon afterwards acted, and appears to have been tolerably well received. *The Unhappy Favourite, or the Earl of Essex*, the best of this writer's pieces, was played at the Theatre

Royal in 1682, and achieved a brilliant popularity. Like other plays by the same author, it affected the female part of the audience especially; and through them the whole town was moved by its pathos, which, whether it lay on the surface, or in the depths of the action, ceased to be canvassed from the moment fashion stamped its approbation on it. Much of its success is probably to be attributed to the acting of Mrs. Barry, who played the part of *Queen Elizabeth*, in the coronation robes of the duchess of York, which her royal highness made her a present of for that purpose. Betterton, in his history of the stage, describes Mrs. Barry's performance of the character to have been one of the greatest triumphs of art ever exhibited on the stage. In this piece Mr. Banks is entitled to the praise of having distributed his subject with consummate ingenuity; but there his merit ends. It is impossible to give him credit for poetry or nature in the language. Sir Richard Steele, who was a sound critic whenever he chose to be serious, observes of this play, that it does not contain one good line, and yet that it was never seen without drawing tears from some part of the audience: "a remarkable instance," he adds, "that the soul is not to be moved by words, but things; for the incidents in this drama are laid together so happily, that the spectator makes the play for himself by the force which the circumstance has upon his imagination." Three English dramatists, Jones, Brook, and Ralph, wrote tragedies on the same basis, and they were all indebted, more or less, to Banks; but none of them equalled him in the management of the plot, while the worst of them infinitely surpassed him in the dialogue. The subject has also been adapted into the French and Italian languages. *The Innocent Usurper, or the Death of Lady Jane Grey*, was the next play written by Banks; but on the ground that it contained some censures on the government (which the author protested he never designed, as a proof of which he stated that it had been written ten years before it was submitted to the chamberlain), it was

not allowed to be acted. Rowe wrote a tragedy on the same melancholy episode in English history; and here again Banks gains by comparison of the stage effects, and loses as much on every other point. His last tragedy, *Cyrus the Great*, which was also forbidden to be acted at first, was produced at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn, in 1696; but upon the fourth day of its representation, one of the principal actors fell ill and died, and the piece was never presented again. From the running observations we have made on these plays, it will be seen that Banks, whatever his pretensions might have been to a knowledge of the mechanical fitness of his materials, was essentially deficient in the power of giving them a natural and truthful expression in language. The whole of his merit lay in the choice of affecting events, and a certain talent in seizing upon the most touching points so as to produce pathetic situations. His plots were happily selected, and displayed with such skill, that the audience were carried away by the suggestions of the scene, rather than by its intrinsic weight or colouring. But he was wholly incapable of infusing into the dialogue the emotions which he thus contrived to throw up as it were to the surface of the action. His lines are bombastic, vapid, and puerile; wanting alike in sense, tenderness, and poetical grace.

Dryden's irascible temperament has bequeathed to posterity some names that must otherwise have sunk into speedy oblivion, and that of Edward Ravenscroft, a contemptible playwright, who lived in the reigns of Charles II. and his two successors, is one of them. Of this writer little more is known than that he had the boldness to throw himself into the ranks of Dryden's opponents, for the sake, it must be presumed, of forcing himself into notoriety; and that he produced twelve plays as his own, not one of which but was either a literal translation or theft from some other writer, or a composite of petty larcenies from several. A comedy presented by him at the Duke's Theatre in 1672, called *Mamamouchi; or, the Citizen turned Gentleman*, which

was taken wholly without acknowledgment from the *Monsieur Pourceaugnac* and the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* of Molière, was ridiculed with some humour by Dryden in one of his prologues. Ravenscroft retorted, and waged war upon the poet, as far as his small wit would enable him, to the end of his life. It would be a waste of time to enter into any detail concerning Ravenscroft's plays, the only object of which would be to expose plagiarisms in which the reader cannot be supposed to feel any interest. The best of his pieces (probably because it contained a greater number of stolen passages than all the others) was *The London Cuckolds*, which was originally acted, with extraordinary success, at the Duke's Theatre, in 1682. This play continued to be acted until 1752, especially on lord-mayor's-day, when Mr. Garrick set the example of breaking through the usage, and substituting another performance in its place. It was revived, however, in the following year; but in 1754 the king commanded the performance of *The Provoked Husband* on the anniversary night, which had the effect of dismissing *The Cuckolds* for ever from the stage. The attraction of the play consisted in its bold immorality, its licentious language, its vulgar humour, and the vast variety, bustle, and confusion of its incidents. The scene was kept perpetually alive by some artifice or intrigue; and what was deficient in probability or propriety was abundantly compensated by excess in the opposite extremes of extravagance and indecency.

Such were the minor contemporaries of Wycherley; a class of men distinguished for the most part by the possession and perversion of remarkable social and literary talents. Of the whole group we have sketched, not one survives to the present day in any one of his works.* But in their own time they were all more or less prominent and popular. It is in this point of view that the great difference between them and Wycherley is most striking. They wrote for the hour, and were content with the buz, the plaudits, the whispers, and the fleeting excitement of which they were the objects;

while Wycherley, penetrating deeper into nature, presented a felicitous combination of qualities, that not only secured the applause of the contemporary age, but fascinated the regards of posterity. The productions of the majority of the dramatic writers who flourished in the reign of Charles II. have long since been banished from the stage, and few of them are ever read in the closet; but Wycherley's plays will always be read as models of English comedy; and one of his pieces, at least, is likely to keep the stage as long as the stage endures.

In 1678 Wycherley produced his *Plain Dealer*, which may justly be considered the most perfect of all his plays. It ran through a number of editions, and was received in the representation with enthusiasm. Dryden appears, on this occasion, to have acted towards *The Plain Dealer* as Boileau did towards *The Misanthrope* of Molière, to which comedy Warton traces its origin. When the *Misanthrope* was originally brought out, the French people gave it a cold reception; the satire was too fine and subtle to be appreciated at first in its full value; but notwithstanding the indifference of the audiences, Boileau, who gave the law in France, pronounced the comedy to be the master-piece of the stage, and predicted for it that popularity which it has since attained, and which his prophecy was in itself almost sufficient to accomplish. *The Plain Dealer* did not stand in need of this sort of critical *imprimatur*, because, at the very first representation, the audience testified unbounded delight, and caught up all the points of wit and ridicule at once. But the approbation of a man like Dryden, who, in spite of the defects and foibles of his character, unquestionably possessed a wonderfully comprehensive mind, and was the first English writer who systematically developed the principles of criticism, could not fail to be of value to the reputation of Wycherley; of such value perhaps as to determine it for ever by a single phrase, and place it, at least while his own influence lasted, beyond the reach of controversy. Upon *The Plain Dealer* Dryden pronounced a flattering eulogium, declar-

ing that it was the boldest, the most general, and most useful satire that was ever presented on the English stage. Warton endeavours to detract something from the merits of the play, by showing that Wycherley was indebted to *The Misanthrope* for some of his characters, and to *The City Romance* of Scarron for one of them; adding, that the French play is superior to the English imitation: but Warton's judgment is not always to be trusted. *The Plain Dealer* is indebted, in the outlines, to Molière; but with what a new world of wit, of individual traits, feelings, and passions, Wycherley has filled them. It is to be desired that many more such hints, so employed, could be traced in our dramatic literature. When other dramatists copied from the French, they sunk beneath their original, and degraded it; but Wycherley, if he cannot be said to have transcended Molière in his own path, takes a different course, and transcends him in the truth and depth of his moral; and, in this instance, in the permanency of his satire.

The Comedy of *The Country Wife* followed *The Plain Dealer* in 1683. The sprightliness and freedom of the dialogue, the entertaining and instructive variety of characters, and the skilful management of the plot, have given to this play even a more extended reputation than any of its predecessors enjoy. In *The Country Wife* Wycherley does not appear to have copied from any former writer, but to have drawn wholly from his own observation. The character of the old guardian is a portrait, the truth of which will always be recognised at once; and, perhaps, the best test of the intrinsic merit of this production is, that if it were translated into any other language, its excellence would be equally apparent. It does not rely upon fictitious manners,—although it is coloured slightly by the tone of the period in which it was written,—but upon the permanent elements of circumstance and character which are the same in all times and countries, modified only by national peculiarities. In Rio or in Muskat, the

hilarity and wilfulness of youth, thrown into a direct contrast and struggle with crusty and suspicious age, would be as intelligible as in any part of England. Hence, such comedies as this are always sure to maintain their popularity alike amongst all classes of people, and throughout all fluctuations of modes and customs. But this comedy, while it is the most perfect of Wycherley's plays, is also the most licentious. The language is frequently lax and indelicate; and there is a vein of levity in one or two characters, that could have been tolerated only in that age, when, as lord Kaimes observes, it was "an established rule to deck out the chief characters with every vice in fashion, however gross." The sterling merits of the piece, however, rise superior to the influence of that bad taste which here and there tarnish the wit with offensive pruriencies; and Mr. Garrick, whose accurate judgment fully appreciated the great capabilities of the play, cleared it of some of its grosser parts, and reproduced it, in 1766, under the title of *The Country Girl.* A piece, entitled *The Country Wife,* had been attempted the year before by a Mr. Lee, but it was merely Wycherley's comedy cut down injudiciously to two acts, by which process its exquisite spirit was permitted to escape, and nothing was retained but the naked skeleton of the plot. Garrick's adaptation continues to keep the stage. It was revived for Mrs. Jordan, whose admirable performance of Peggy was one of the most brilliant attractions of the theatre; and is still acted whenever a representative can be found who is able to undertake that part. Of Mr. Garrick's alteration of the comedy it may be observed, that while it preserves, without deduction, the whole of the unexceptionable wit of the original, the task of excision, in reference to its excesses in other respects, has not been performed with sufficient firmness. Perhaps our present standard of morals is somewhat more exacting than that of Garrick's day; but, however that may be, *The*

Country Girl demands fresh revision, to adapt it to the taste of the 19th century.

The acquaintance which Wycherley formed, as we have already mentioned, with the duke of Buckingham, rapidly ripened into the warmest esteem. His grace was so charmed by the poet's social accomplishments, which all his contemporaries agree in describing to have been of the most fascinating quality, that he resolved to keep him near his person, and he accordingly conferred upon him a commission as captain-lieutenant in his regiment, relinquishing in his favour his own pay, and all the other advantages that could be reaped from the appointment, making him, at the same time, one of his equerries as master of the horse. Nor was Buckingham's liberal patronage satisfied with these immediate offices of friendship; he interested the king warmly in favour of Wycherley, who received frequent proofs of his majesty's bounty and regards. Indeed, Wycherley seems to have made an extraordinary impression on the king, for, upon one occasion, when he was lying ill of a fever at his lodgings in Bow-street, Covent Garden, Charles went to pay him a visit, and finding him in low spirits, and greatly shattered in health, he recommended him to try the effects of the gentle air of Montpellier, adding, that so soon as he was able to travel, he would provide him with the sum of 500*l.* to defray the costs of his journey. Wycherley gratefully accepted his majesty's offer, went into France, and returned in the following spring completely recruited in mind and body. Another signal testimony of the confidence which the king reposed in him now awaited the fortunate dramatist. He had no sooner presented himself at court than his majesty informed him that he had a project in contemplation for the suitable education of the young prince, with a view to the high and responsible position he was destined one day or another to fill; that he did not know of any person who was so eminently qualified to undertake the duties of governor or tutor to his son as Mr. Wycherley himself; intimating, that the salary which he pro-

posed to annex to these duties was 1500*l.* per annum, which should be secured by an assignment on three different offices, and that care should be taken, when his governorship expired, to provide amply for him by some other means.

Wycherley, at this moment, had reached the height of his fortunes. The favourite of the town, courted by the most fashionable and influential persons, flattered by the attention of women of the first rank and most distinguished beauty, and now about to be taken into the close confidence of his sovereign as tutor to the heir of the throne, nothing was wanted to complete his felicity. But at this very moment, which seemed to be the most prosperous of his life, he was on the eve of an event which suddenly destroyed his fair prospects, and plunged him into distresses which it was impossible to foresee or prevent.

Immediately after he had received the intimation of his majesty's gracious intentions towards him, Wycherley went to Tunbridge, which was, at that time, a place of considerable resort on account of the celebrity of the waters. Passing through the Wells-walk with his friend, Mr. Fairbeard, of Gray's Inn, the Countess of Drogheda, a young widow of great beauty and wealth, happened to reach the door of a bookseller's shop just as Wycherley was about to enter, and inquired, not knowing who Wycherley was, for *The Plain Dealer.* "Madam," said Mr. Fairbeard (as Dennis relates the story), "since you are for *The Plain Dealer*, there he is for you," pushing Mr. Wycherley towards her at the same time. "Yes," observed Wycherley, with his usual promptitude and gallantry, "this lady can bear plain dealing, for she appears to be so accomplished, that what would be compliment addressed to others, would be plain dealing addressed to her." The duchess replied to this sally with "No, truly sir, I am not without my faults any more than the rest of my sex; and yet, notwithstanding all my faults, I love plain dealing, and am never more fond of it than when it tells me of my

faults." "Then, madam," interposed Mr. Fairbeard, who appears to have played his part in the scene with excellent taste and good-humour, "you and the *Plain Dealer* seem designed by heaven for each other."

It was as Mr. Fairbeard prophesied. Wycherley, availing himself of the countess's permission, visited her daily during her stay at Tunbridge, and attended her every where she went in public, continued his solicitations after she returned to her house at Hatton Garden in London, proposed for her, was accepted and, obtaining privately his father's consent, was shortly afterwards married to her, without having previously procured the approbation and sanction of his majesty, or having announced his design to any persons except those who were immediately concerned in it. This secrecy is said to have been imposed upon him, by his father, who, understanding that the lady had a large fortune, was anxious to secure so good a match for his son, and who feared, that if it were made known to his majesty, measures might be taken to prevent it. The old gentleman's estimate of the king's feelings in such matters was, no doubt, perfectly correct; but he altogether overlooked, in his anxiety to bring about the marriage, the consequences of such a stealthy proceeding on the part of a court favourite. The circumstance was no sooner discovered at the palace than his majesty regarded it as an act of contumacy, and resented it with bitterness. Still it might have been possible, by the interference of judicious friends, to have conciliated the king; but, unfortunately, Wycherley was compelled, by domestic discontents, to absent himself from court, so that what at first might have been considered merely as the error of an impetuous nature, began by degrees to take the form of deliberate and wilful ingratitude. The countess, it appeared, was a woman of a most jealous disposition; and, as Wycherley's reputation with her sex was none of the most distinguished for purity or constancy, her natural temper was worked up to such a frenzy of suspicion after her marriage, that she could scarcely endure

him to leave her presence. To such extremities is she reputed to have carried her distrust that, whenever he went to the Cock, which was exactly opposite their lodgings in Bow-street, where he used occasionally to meet some of his old companions, he was obliged to keep the windows of the room in which he sat open that his wife might assure herself there were no females in the company. This foolish passion, which curbed the movements of the poet, and withdrew him from all those associations that he had hitherto so successfully cultivated, completely effected his ruin with the court. The king never forgave him, and he was gradually suffered to sink into obscurity.

If his marriage had realized the pecuniary expectations it held out to him, he might have endured this change in his situation with a good grace; but, unfortunately, nothing came of it but chagrin and disappointment. The countess did not live long; and, although she settled her whole fortune on him, Wycherley not only did not derive any advantage from her liberality, but had reason to ascribe to it the greatest calamities of his life. After her decease, the title under which he claimed her property was disputed at law, and the inevitable expenses to which he was exposed by the suits that followed, reduced him to such difficulties, that he was unable to meet the demands of his creditors, and was cast into prison. His obligations were so considerable that his father, who still possessed a competent estate in the country, was unable to extricate him; and the luckless poet languished in confinement for seven years*; nor is it improbable that he might have ended his life in prison, but for the generosity of king James, who, chancing to witness the performance of *The Plain Dealer* at the theatre, and being greatly struck with its merits, issued orders for the payment in full of all his debts, settling also a pension of 200*l.* per annum on him while

* During this period Wycherley appears to have been frequently reduced to extremities. All his former friends deserted him; and even the bookseller, who had made a large sum of money by the sale of *The Plain Dealer*, refused to lend him 20*l.* which he solicited at his hands.

he lived in England. This munificent benefaction would have placed Wycherley, for the remainder of his life, in easy circumstances, had he suffered it to be carried into effect in the full spirit of his majesty's intention; but a false sense of pride or delicacy restrained him from disclosing the whole amount of his incumbrances to the earl of Mulgrave, who was commissioned to discharge them; and, accordingly, when he was released from prison, there still hung over him a large unliquidated balance of liabilities. He struggled against his difficulties with a depressed mind, for it was now too late for the visions of hope to cheer and animate his efforts. By the death of his father, which occurred soon after, he inherited the patrimonial property; but, being only a tenant for life, and unable to raise money upon it for the payment of his debts, it afforded him but slight relief. In this exigency he adopted the desperate expedient of marrying a young lady possessed of a clear fortune of 1500*l*. Making a jointure upon his wife, he appllied a part of her portion to his own uses; but the welcome assistance came too late. His health and spirits had already given way to accumulated suffering and protracted humiliations. He survived his nuptials only eleven days, and died in December, 1715. His remains were deposited in a vault in Covent Garden church.

Wycherley is entitled to all the credit of having been the first English comic poet, who exhibited upon the stage with truth, force, and wit, the mixed comedy of nature and manners; who showed the passions and humours of men through the fleeting conventions and artificial modes of society. Comedy, previously to Wycherley, took a different, and, for the most part, a more elevated range; pourtrayed individual eccentricities and individual character; or developed generalities that are not affected by the changes of fashion; or was sustained solely by the ingenuity and complexity of its plot, but seldom descended into the actual living habitudes of domestic life, for the groundwork of its inci-

dents, and the modification of its characters. Wycherley has given us the first specimens of this latter description of comedy. Whatever was done in this way before him merely indicated the ore on the surface; it was reserved for him to trace the vein inwards. But had he merely drawn evanescent manners, his works could not have survived the age in which they were written. The permanent traits of life — the qualities, the attributes, and tempers of mankind, alike in all ages, however they may be heightened or softened by accidental influences — are painted by him with such depth, power, and vitality, that time will only have the effect of confirming their excellence. These are the features of his comedies upon which his fame must be content to subsist; the conventional life he describes, with all its fantastic fripperies and revolting licentiousness, has already perished; and the subsequent progress of society in taste and morals rejects that which was once true, because it is true no longer.

It has been said of Wycherley that he attacks vice with the severity of a cynic and the language of a libertine. The severity with which he is charged represents merely the better part of his nature struggling against the vices of the day; and the language of the libertine was no more than the expression of that struggle in the only language that could then have rendered it intelligible and effective. Lord Roscommon, who knew him well, and no man was better able to estimate him correctly; tells us that it might with truth be said of him, as it was of lord Dorset, that he was

"The best good man with the worst-natured muse;"

that, pointed and severe as he was in his writings, in his temper he had all the softness of the tenderest disposition; that he was gentle and inoffensive to every man in his particular character; and that he only attacked vice as a public enemy. Instead of blaming him for his severity, which was not a fault in the man, but a virtue in the satirist, it is rather to be regretted

that he did not take a wider range, and that his example was not more generally imitated by others. But unfortunately his wit was more infectious than his morality; and all those dramatists who came after him copied his licentiousness, only re-minting all its flashing devices, without caring much for the solid gold, to which, in his hands, it was merely the external embellishment. The licentiousness of Wycherley is neither to be denied nor defended. He transgressed largely in that respect. Whether the transgression can be sufficiently excused by the fact that it was common to the period in which he lived, is a question that, however criticism may deal with it, must still be finally decided by the degree of sensibility in which it is regarded by the reader.

Wycherley appears to have fallen into the mistake of believing that he possessed talents for poetry of other kinds than that in which he excelled all his contemporaries. He published a volume of poems in folio in 1704, but the public treated them with indifference, simply because they were intrinsically bad. About this time Wycherley formed an acquaintance with Pope, who was then young, and ambitious of the friendship of a man who enjoyed so distinguished a reputation. Wycherley entertained so high an opinion of Pope, that he inscribed some verses to him, which Dennis afterwards accused Pope of having written to himself. Indeed Wycherley carried his confidence in Pope's judgment so far as to submit his poems to him for revision. This led to a correspondence between them, which will be found amongst Pope's letters, and in which Pope, who early discovered that turn for malicious criticism that is so strikingly displayed in his maturer productions, suggested some bold alterations, and even went so far as to recommend Wycherley to turn his poetry into prose. This was an offence which Wycherley never pardoned. "The old scribbler," as Dr. Johnson inconsiderately designates him, "was angry to see his pages defaced, and felt more pain from the detection than content from the amendment of his faults." But Pope bore his re-

sentment with a better grace than might have been expected; and, although their intercourse ceased after this pungent commentary, he visited Wycherley a short time before his death.

It would be a matter of surprise that a dramatist, who produced but five comedies, of which but two, *The Plain Dealer* and *The Country Wife*, have maintained their popularity, should hold so distinguished a place amongst the writers for the English stage, were it not that their value is in the inverse ratio to their quantity. That merit must be considerable which, in so small a compass, created such a large reputation. It might be said of Wycherley, as it has been said of a living poet, that he was one of the few writers who might be blamed for having written so little; and some of his contemporaries appear to have inferred, that because he did not write much, he must have been either indolent or tedious about his labours. Thus Southerne, in a complimentary poem addressed to Congreve, says:—

> "His eldest Wycherley, in wise retreat,
> Thought it not worth his quiet to be great."

And lord Rochester insinuates that he wrote with pain:—

> "Of all our modern wits, none seem to me
> Once to have touched upon true comedy,
> But hasty Shadwell and slow Wycherley;"

adding, after describing Shadwell's "unfinished works,"

> "But Wycherley earns hard whate'er he gains,
> He wants no judgment, and he spares no pains:
> He frequently excels, and at the least,
> Makes fewer faults than any of the rest."

Against this judgment lord Roscommon protests. He says that, if *hasty* would have stood as an epithet for Wycherley, and *slow* for Shadwell, they would in all pob ability have been so applied, but the verse would have been spoilt, and so that it was necessary to submit.

This criticism, however, is not very satisfactory, and may be dismissed as nothing better than a transparent artifice to strain a point against Rochester's integrity in favour of Wycherley. Rochester, who was a great admirer of Wycherley, could not have found any difficulty in using the epithets either way if it suited his purpose to transpose them. He was too skilful a versifier not to be able to invert his words so as to express his real meaning and preserve the melody of the line at the same time. For instance, might he not have presented it thus if he cared to do so —

"But Shadwell slow, and hasty Wycherley?"

Lord Roscommon gives us a better reason in the character he has drawn of Wycherley for supposing that he wrote with facility, than in this wire-drawn and inconclusive scrap of word-catching. He tells us, that "those who would form their judgment only from Mr. Wycherley's writings, without any personal acquaintance with him, might indeed be apt to conclude that such a diversity of images and characters, such strict inquiries into nature, such close observations on the several humours, manners, and affections of all ranks and degrees of men, and, as it were, so true and perfect a dissection of human kind, delivered with so much pointed wit and force of expression, could be no other than the work of extraordinary diligence, labour, and application; but, in truth, we owe the pleasure and advantage of having been so well entertained and instructed by him to his facility of doing it. If it had been a trouble to him to write, I am much mistaken if he would not have spared himself that trouble." The rapid flow of wit and knowledge of mankind, for which the conversation of Wycherley was remarkable, would appear to justify lord Roscommon's appreciation of the ease with which he wrote, although the one does not necessarily follow from the other. But if he wrote with ease, why did he not write more? Whether, however, he wrote with ease or toil, the excellence, the

variety, and the brilliancy of his dramas admit of no question. Dryden, in a single line, has struck off with felicity the attributes of this great dramatist, when, addressing Congreve, he alludes to

> "The satire, wit, and strength of manly Wycherley."

This last characteristic peculiarly belongs to him. The vigour of his satire drew even from Congreve, who was not willing to acknowledge how much he was indebted to him, a measure of admiration in the prologue to *Love for Love*: —

> "Since the *Plain Dealer's* scene of manly rage,
> Not one has dared to lash this crying age."

Such testimonies as these might readily be accumulated; but the best proofs of Wycherley's title to fame are to be found in his works, which have been a mine of character, dialogue, and design, to subsequent dramatists. Although Wycherley's comedies can never be restored to the stage as he wrote them, for the reasons we have incidentally stated, yet they will long continue to be presented in such altered forms as the refinement of modern audiences may render necessary. They never can be wholly forgotten.

JOHN VANBRUGH.

(1666—1726.)

The year of sir John Vanbrugh's birth has not been ascertained with certainty, and is variously stated by different writers. According to Walpole, and some of the Cyclopedias, he was born "about" 1672; while, in a sketch of his life, prefixed to an edition of his works published in London in 1759, we are informed that he was born in 1666. The *Biographia Dramatica*, resolved to be cautious for once, evades the difficulty altogether by stating that he was born "about the middle of the reign of Charles II." We have no hesitation in adopting the authority of the London edition of 1759; which is, on many accounts, best entitled to credit.*

The family of sir John Vanbrugh were originally merchants of consideration at Antwerp, and came into England during the reign of queen Elizabeth, on account of the religious persecutions of the sanguinary duke of Alva, which, at that time, rendered Flanders an unsafe residence for protestants.† He was born in the parish of St. Stephen's, Walbrook; and, after having received

* It is right, however, to observe that the author of this sketch has borrowed freely here and there from Colley Cibber's *Apology*, but upon points which do not detract from his title to our confidence

† "Sir John," say the *Biographia Dramatica*, "was descended from an ancient family of Cheshire, which came originally from France; though, by his name, he should appear to be of Dutch extraction" This ancient family of Cheshire, which came originally from France, is, we need scarcely observe, an error adopted for want of better authority, probably in the first instance, and transmitted through the pages of the *Biographia Dramatica* by the negligence of the editors. The duke of Alva, whose persecutions drove the Vanbrughs out of Antwerp, did not land in the Netherlands until 1567: therefore the expatriation of the family could not have taken place at an earlier period than an hundred years before the birth of the poet. Whether this term, the greater part of which appears to have been passed in London, would entitle them to be considered "an ancient family of Cheshire," the reader must determine agreeably to his own notions of antiquity.

the elements of a liberal education, was sent, at the age of nineteen, by his father into France, where he continued to reside for some years, until his friends procured for him an ensigncy in the English army, which recalled him home. He is said to have discovered very early an irrepressible love of poetry, and to have been the most companionable and agreeable member of the mess-table, where his wit and vivacity rendered him an universal favourite. While he remained in the service, which could not have been more than a few years, his talent for dramatic writing discovered itself in some scenes of a comedy (afterwards produced under the title of *The Provoked Wife*), which he sketched; but being distrustful of his success in that way, he flung them aside until subsequent circumstances induced him to complete them and bring them forward on the stage. At this period his means were limited; and as his disposition was more liberal than his resources, he was occasionally compelled to place himself under obligations of a pecuniary kind to some of his friends. Happening, at his winter-quarters, to form an acquaintance with sir Thomas Skipwith, who possessed a large share in the theatrical patent at Drury-lane, although he gave little personal attention to the affairs of the theatre, sir John Vanbrugh received a particular favour from that gentleman, and afterwards thought of repaying it by writing a piece for the theatre, which was not then in a very prosperous state. It was this circumstance which led to the production of *The Relapse*, which was written in six weeks.

The great applause that attended Cibber's play of *Love's last Shift*, suggested to Vanbrugh the design of continuing the characters of that piece into a sequel, an experiment which has rarely succeeded on the stage, but which in this instance was followed by an extraordinary measure of approbation. *The Relapse* was even more triumphant than the play of which it literally forms a second part; but this circumstance may, perhaps, be easily accounted for by the higher tone of real life with which the licentious wit of the dialogue is impregnated.

In Cibber's comedy, which Congreve described as a piece that had in it a great many things that were like wit, but that in reality were not wit, the pleasantry is frequently of a frothy and vapid character, while Vanbrugh's comedy flows on to the end with incessant liveliness, and the personages are made to fulfil upon the scene that complete figure of fashion and extravagance which Cibber intended to describe, but did not substantially accomplish. The difference, perhaps, may be traced to the different circumstances under which these authors produced their plays. The one was an actor, well acquainted with the conventions of his art, and who, in writing for the stage, kept in view the means by which theatrical efforts were most easily brought out; while the other, comparatively ignorant of the art, relied less upon the skill of the artists than the intrinsic merit of the play. Hence Cibber's comedy was essentially an excellent stage play, while Vanbrugh's was more directly derived from his own social experiences. *The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger*, was played at Drury-lane in the winter of 1696. The spirit of the scene was admirably preserved in the representation; but the libertinism of some parts of the plot, whatever toleration it might have been received with in that day, is in the last degree reprehensible. In this respect Cibber, notwithstanding all the charges that have been brought against him, is less open to censure than his witty successor. The moral of his play was to restore a profligate husband to his family, but Vanbrugh brought the hero back into the fashion by making him relapse from his virtuous resolution.

The reception which *The Relapse* met was so encouraging, that lord Halifax, who favoured Betterton's rival company at Lincoln's Inn Fields, and who had formerly chanced to see some of the detached scenes of *The Provoked Wife*, prevailed on Vanbrugh to revise and complete that comedy. He was of course easily persuaded to oblige so distinguished a patron of dramatic poetry, nor did his compliance offend sir Thomas Skip-

with, who engaged his next venture for his own house. *The Provoked Wife* was produced at Lincoln's Inn in 1697, with universal applause.

It is to be regretted that the fine talents of Vanbrugh, which in this comedy appear to still greater advantage than in *The Relapse*, should have been so desecrated by the prevailing immorality of his age, as to tempt him into the portraiture of scenes that must be excluded from the modern stage, by the depth of their vice. The characters in this play, especially that of sir John Brute, are drawn with consummate skill, and the dialogue is easy, brilliant, and natural: but the plot is more licentious in its conduct and situations than any contemporary production with which we are acquainted. and absolutely demoralising in the principle of domestic retaliation it attempts to justify. A surly and unfeeling husband is here retorted upon by his wife, who sacrifices her own honour by way of taking revenge upon him for his ill-treatment of her: and this mode of avenging herself is admitted by the catastrophe to be perfectly reasonable and correct. The audiences appear to have borne all this with infinite good-humour, because it was the usage to laugh at broad jokes, without caring to reflect upon the consequences involved in them. The humour of the disgrace put upon the husband was accepted as a satisfactory compromise for the gross violation of the wife's responsibility; and because the scenes were carried on with unabated vivacity, a free license was extended to a species of delinquency, which, in all ages of the christian world, has been regarded with a common feeling of indignation. This was one of the plays which excited the just censure of Collier; and it must be confessed, that as the stage at that period allowed such things to be presented to the public, the lash of the moralist was not applied before it was required. It is not a little remarkable in reference to this production, that while the main thread of the immorality was passed over without reproach, a couple of scenes in which sir John Brute assumes the disguise of

a clergyman, and under that mask acts like a profligate, offended the sensitive audiences so deeply, that sir John Vanbrugh was obliged to re-write them, and make the coarse rake disguise himself as a woman of quality, in which character, his tavern levity and uproarious indecency passed off as a very entertaining jest.*

The next piece by sir John Vanbrugh, was called *Æsop*, and was produced in the same year at Drury-lane. It is a comedy in five acts, derived from a French play, written about six years before by Monsieur Borsaut. The success of this piece in Paris, where it was played for fourteen nights, induced sir John Vanbrugh to try it on the English stage with some alterations and additions of its own, but it proved to be too dull and to have too much the tone of a dramatic lecture upon character, for the vitiated taste of the day. The introduction of a country gentleman into the fourth act, and the whole of the fifth act, founded on a passage in the life of Beau Nash, belong to Vanbrugh — the rest to the Frenchman. This performance, although the style throughout is tinged with licentiousness, may be praised for the morality that floats through the scenes; but it is hardly adapted for the stage. The want of a regular plot to sustain the interest, must always prevent such pieces, however excellent in other respects, from keeping a permanent place amongst the stock plays. † It struggled through a week, and was then laid aside. An attempt was made to revive it in 1778 at Drury-lane, but the adapter, supposed to be Richard Brinsley Sheridan, did not sufficiently clear it of its grossness,

* This comedy, in its amended form, was specially called for by the court and most of the nobility

† Colley Cibber discovers a very different reason for the failure of this piece, in the wisdom of its sentences. "The character," he observes, "that delivers precepts of wisdom is, in some sort, severe upon the auditor, by showing him one wiser than himself But when folly is his object, he applauds himself, for being wiser than the coxcomb he laughs at, and who is not more pleased with an occasion to commend than accuse himself?" If this criticism be true, then the drama of Shakspeare is unfit for representation, and the stage, instead of being the mirror of nature, instructing as well as delighting, is nothing better than a means of empty flattery, and low amusement.

and it was unanimously condemned on the first performance.

In 1702, sir John Vanbrugh brought out *The False Friend,* a comedy which did not meet much success at first, and which was subsequently revived with no better, by the late John Philip Kemble, who altered some of the scenes, particularly the catastrophe, and produced it in 1789 at Drury-lane. All the alterations that have been attempted in Vanbrugh's plays, with a desire to adapt them to the improved taste of a later age, have equally failed. The licentiousness of his scenes is so interwoven with the wit and the action, that it cannot be got rid of without sacrificing that genius and spirit which constitute the chief merit of his dramatic writings.

The accession of queen Anne in the following year opened a gratifying prospect to men of letters, from the esteem in which her Majesty was known to hold them; and Vanbrugh easily obtained a recognition of his talents, in the appointment of clarencieux king-at-arms, which at once gave him an influence at court that he speedily turned to a profitable account. He projected the building of a new theatre in the Haymarket, upon a scale of grandeur beyond that of any existing house, a project which his skill in architecture peculiarly adapted him to carry out with vigour and effect; and, raising a subscription of thirty persons of quality at 100*l.* each, in consideration of which sum each subscriber was to hold a free admission for life, this design was rapidly completed. How Vanbrugh acquired his architectural knowledge and qualifications we are not informed, but his first essay in that capacity was in the erection of the Haymarket theatre. The first stone was laid in 1703-4, with the inscription, " The Little Whig," in honour of a lady who was the reigning toast of the whig party. When the theatre was finished in 1706, Betterton and his co-partners, who were interested in the work, dissolved their own agreement, and placed the management

exclusively in the hands of sir John Vanbrugh and Mr. Congreve, believing that a theatre under the control of two such popular and fashionable authors would be more likely to prosper, than if the speculation merely relied upon the practical knowledge of the more experienced actors. They depended, too, in a great measure upon the attractions of the new and splendid temple which the magnificent genius of sir John had designed; but in both these expectations they were disappointed.

Of the theatre, when it opened, we learn that it was deficient in all those points of convenience that are indispensable in reference to the uses of such a building, and that seeing and hearing were sacrificed to the mere wonders of space and gilding. The ceiling over the orchestra was a semi-oval arch, that sprang fifteen feet above the cornice; while that over the pit was still more elevated, being, says Cibber (to whom we are indebted for the detail), one level line from the highest back part of the upper gallery to the front of the stage. The front boxes were continued in a semi-circle to the bare walls of the house on each side; and in the superfluous space that was thus left in the centre, the voices of the actors sounded like the chattering of people in the lofty aisles of a cathedral. Nor was the form of the theatre (which it was afterwards found necessary to alter,) the only objection: the situation in which it was built was too remote from the busy parts of the town to procure sufficient audiences to maintain its cost. The "west end," Regent-street, Hanover, Grosvenor, and Cavendish Squares, and all those populous neighbourhoods that have since extended the limits of town so far into the country, were then a succession of green fields; and the Haymarket theatre was so distant from the city that, even had it presented greater attractions than the wittiest dramatists, and the best company of players could furnish, it could not prevail upon the great body of the play-goers to make such a journey after their curiosity was satisfied in the

first instance. As to the hopes that were reposed in the productions of Vanbrugh and Congreve, the fallacy was soon rendered abundantly apparent. Vanbrugh was a quick writer, but Congreve was slow and cautious. Were they both, however, equally clever and rapid, there was still the public caprice, and the chances of success to be taken into calculation. But Betterton and his friends were dazzled by the splendour of the undertaking, and surrendered their judgment in the exultation of the moment.

The Italian opera had, just before this time, begun to be transplanted into this country. The first attempts in this way were as rude as the very infancy of theatrical entertainments. The operas were translated into English, and sung by our own cold and uncultivated singers. A single Italian, signor Valentini, had been drawn over to London, and his appearance in the opera of *Camilla* exhibited the extraordinary anomaly of one part sung in the Italian language, which alone he understood, and all the others in English. But the novelty gained upon the public, who even before the Restoration, as we have shown in former biographies, were fond of running after foreigners, and brought crowded houses to Drury-lane, when this great absurdity was originally introduced. The success of these Italian productions induced Vanbrugh and Congreve to open their house with a translated opera, called *The Triumph of Love;* but, in consequence of the inadequacy of the singers, the difficulty of hearing distinctly in so large a building, and the want of merit in the piece itself, the ill-contrived novelty was abandoned after the third night, and Vanbrugh immediately produced his comedy of *The Confederacy*, a piece taken, but considerably improved, from the *Bourgeois à-la-Mode* of Dancour. The reception of this play was as liberal as could be expected from an auditory who were compelled to take for granted the greater part of the dialogue, which, instead of finding its way to their ears, was carried off to the ceiling, and came back upon them

in indistinct echoes. Vanbrugh's taste seems to have degenerated more and more as he advanced in the cultivation of dramatic writing. *The Confederacy* is still more immoral than any of his former pieces; but the wit is perhaps also more brisk and entertaining. In the management of the plot, in the scheme of the fortune-hunters, and the dexterous conspiracy of two wives against their husbands, the author displays so much skill and such a happy appreciation of the ridiculous, that could he have kept clear of that dangerous and revolting levity, which must for ever banish his comedies from the stage, he might have achieved as lasting a reputation as any comic poet in the language. He exhibits an intimate knowledge of society in this, as well as in his other plays; and his characters are admirably pointed and finished: but the nature which he pourtrays is a conventional nature, the fidelity of which would be recognised and understood only in the times in which it existed. It was not a nature that speaks to the business and sympathies and knowledge of all seasons, surviving in its universal truth the mutations of fashion, and the perishing vanities of the hour. We may dismiss *The Confederacy* in the words of lord Gardenstone, who describes it in terms to which we can add nothing: "This is one of those plays," observes his lordship, "which throw infamy on the English stage and general taste; though it is not destitute of wit and humour. A people must be, in the last degree, depraved, among whom such public entertainments are produced and encouraged. In this symptom of degenerate manners we are, I believe, unmatched by any nation that is, or ever was, in the world."

The comparative failure of *The Confederacy*, and the indifference of the public towards the Haymarket speculation, gradually exhausted the enthusiasm of Congreve, who, being of a more careful temperament than his partner, now resolved to risk neither his reputation nor his purse in hopeless attempts to persuade the

citizens that a large house, in which they could only catch occasional portions of the dialogue, was to be preferred to those more compact houses, where they could follow every word and motion with perfect satisfaction of the interest. He accordingly relinquished his share in the theatre, and retired wholly from its management, leaving sir John Vanbrugh the sole director of the establishment. In this emergency, recourse was had to a variety of adaptations from the French, and Vanbrugh, working hard for the safety of a desperate venture, produced in the same season no less than three pieces borrowed from Molière: these were, *The Cuckold in Conceit*, taken from the *Cocu Imaginaire*; *Squire Trelooby*, from *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*; and *The Mistake*, from the *Dépit Amoureux*. But these pieces, excellent as they were, had no better fortune. The "undistinguished utterance" brought them all to the same level; for, as Cibber slyly suggests, what few could plainly hear it was not likely a great many would applaud.

The prospects of the theatre were now becoming more gloomy every night. The attempt to rival the company at Drury Lane was already proved to be hopeless before the first Haymarket season was over, notwithstanding that Vanbrugh had secured the services of all the popular performers of the Lincoln's Inn company. But of that group of excellent players the most distinguished were either dead or superannuated, including Smith, Kynaston, Sandford, and Leigh, who were dead; and Mrs. Betterton and Underhill, who had retired. Betterton himself was now upwards of seventy; and although he still retained his faculties, it could not be expected that his attraction should continue undiminished. The union of the two theatres, and a coalition administration, appeared to present the only means of making both houses profitable. But this suggestion was coldly received by the Drury Lane manager, who, having prosperity at his side, wisely resolved not to link his fortunes with a failing concern.

Sir John Vanbrugh, on the other hand, was too desirous of relieving himself from the responsibility in which he had so inconsiderately embarked, to appear anxious about it, hoping that his apparent indifference would ultimately bring it about with better terms. But in this view of the case he was mistaken, and at length, wearied of disappointment, he made an offer of the house to Mr. Owen Swiny, who was acting in the matter with the secret concurrence of the Drury Lane manager. The conditions proposed were, that the agreements of salary were to be made with the performers; and the house, wardrobe, and scenery were to be transferred to Mr. Swiny with the queen's license, upon payment of the rent of *5l.* per day on every acting day, it being expressly stipulated that the entered annual rent should not exceed *700l.* This negotiation completed, sir John Vanbrugh resigned the management into hands that ultimately accomplished success where he had failed. Swiny drew over the flower of the Drury-lane company by practising an artifice upon his friend the manager, and effectually turned the tide of public patronage in favour of the Haymarket theatre. But the history of those transactions does not come legitimately within the compass of this memoir.

Sir John Vanbrugh now dedicated himself to that profession, by his labours in which he is more likely to be known to posterity than by his dramatic productions. It is probable that his literary talents were a higher recommendation to the protection of the queen than his skill as an architect; but he was fortunate enough to render them subservient to his advancement through the channels of his profession in a more profitable way than if he had continued to devote himself to the service of the muses. In 1706 he was commissioned by queen Anne to carry the habit and ensigns of the order of the garter to the king, who was then at Hanover, and in 1714 he was knighted. In addition to these marks of royal patronage, the erection of the palace of Blenheim, voted by the nation to the duke of Marlborough, was

committed to him; and George I. appointed him in 1716 to the lucrative offices of surveyor of the buildings at Greenwich Hospital, and comptroller-general of the royal works, and surveyor of the gardens and waters. That he devoted himself assiduously to his duties there is sufficient reason to believe, however he may have acquitted himself in the opinion of the more refined and accomplished critics on works of art. The estimation in which he stood may be judged from the undertakings in which he was engaged, since, besides the palace of Blenheim, he built castle Howard, and many other houses of the nobility, and public edifices throughout England. His name, however, as an architect, has been treated with so much ridicule, which, in his own day, was, no doubt, partially actuated by personal motives, professional jealousy, and party spleen, that it is almost impossible to separate it from the associations with which it has been transmitted to us. That the strange irregularity of his structures partly exposed him to condemnation, must be admitted; and perhaps the character that is drawn of him by Walpole, however it is heightened by the exaggerated spirit of the expression, is true on the whole. "He wanted," says Walpole, "all ideas of proportion, convenience, and propriety. He undertook vast designs, and composed heaps of littleness. The style of no age, no country, appears in his works; he broke through all rule, and compensated for it by no imagination. He seems to have hollowed quarries, rather than to have built houses; and should his edifices, as they seem formed to do, outlast all record, what architecture will posterity think was that of their ancestors?" This is undoubtedly just; but even all this, severe as it is, was less injurious to the fame of the architect, than the spiteful epigram of Dr. Evans, which is likely to outlive the most elaborate criticism:

"Lie heavy on him earth, for he
Laid many a heavy load on thee."

But with the architectural merits or demerits of Vanbrugh, we have nothing to do here, beyond the record of the opinions that have been generally expressed concerning them; opinions, we apprehend, which even the forbearance that affects to discover in the picturesque variety of his buildings a compensation for their want of unity, is not very likely to reverse.

Upon the occasion of a visit to Paris, sir John Vanbrugh was so unfortunate as to be detected taking views of the fortifications; and several plans of military fortresses being found in his possession, he was imprisoned in the Bastille, on the suspicion of being a spy. During the time he was confined there, he is said to have amused himself in making sketches of future comedies, none of which, however, he completed. He spoke French with remarkable elegance and fluency, and his wit interested some of the French nobility so much on his behalf, that they interfered with the king, and obtained his liberation some days before a solicitation in his favour was received from England. In 1719 he was married to Henrietta Maria, daughter of colonel Yarborough of Haslington, near York, by whom he had three children: of these, the eldest, Charles, was killed at the battle of Fontenoy, and the others died in infancy. Sir John survived his marriage seven years, during which time, having entirely forsaken the haunts of literature, he devoted himself to the more profitable avocations, in which, towards the end of his life, his whole time became engrossed. He died of a quinsey at his house in Scotland Yard, Whitehall, in 1726.

Sir John Vanbrugh left behind some fragments of a comedy, which coming into the hands of Mr. Colley Cibber were by him completed for representation, and brought out under the title of *The Provoked Husband.* The history of the reception of this piece is not altogether destitute of interest. Some few years previously, Cibber, moved by the jacobite rebellion, and deeming that the satire of comedy applied to the subject might be of some practical utility, converted the *Tartuffe* of Molière into an

English *Nonjuror,* and adding a stronger spice of priestly wickedness to the character, brought it on the stage. The play was received with great applause, and acted for eighteen successive nights; but it made a multitude of enemies for the author, who, however, in the existing state of political feelings, were timid in taking open vengeance upon him or his piece; but from that time forward, they omitted no opportunity of showing their resentment. One writer in particular, the editor of *Mist's Weekly Journal,* continued to persecute poor Cibber with his ribaldry for fifteen years. But the first fair occasion that offered for directly assailing him, was upon the production of *The Provoked Husband*; and accordingly they gathered in Drury-lane theatre in great strength, and for a night or two endeavoured to cry down the comedy; nor were they satisfied with this: they attacked it fiercely in all their periodicals, denouncing it in sweeping terms, and attempting, by general and contemptuous censure, to drive it at once from the stage. Failing in this attempt, and hearing that a part of it was written by sir John Vanbrugh, but ignorant which portion was his, and which belonged to Cibber, they bestowed the highest applause on those passages which concern the development of the domestic differences between lord and lady Townley, believing them to have been written by Vanbrugh, and condemned unreservedly the whole of the humorous episode of the Wronghead family. Perhaps the mere malignity of party spirit never over-reached itself more completely than in this instance; since it so happened, that the part which Cibber's enemies condemned, because they suspected it to have been written by him, was really the production of Vanbrugh, while the parts they praised, and praised extravagantly too, for the sake of making the sting more severe, were in fact all his own. Cibber, to set theirs and his own fame right in the eyes of the town, published Vanbrugh's MS. scenes exactly as he left them, under the single title of *The Journey to London,* and gained a signal triumph

over his foes. The success of the play was very great; it was acted on twenty-eight nights with undiminished interest, and on the last night of its performance brought a hundred and fifty pounds into the treasury of the theatre.

For the construction of *The Provoked Husband* as a whole, Vanbrugh, of course, is not responsible; nor are we aware how he intended to fill out his design, so as to render it a perfect comedy. He is responsible only for the journey of the Wronghead family to London, and for the first rude draft of the Townley group, wanting the working up of the plot and the catastrophe, for he carried his sketch of the scenes only as far as the third act. In the play, as it was re-modelled and finished by Cibber, a deeper tone of seriousness and propriety is imparted to the character of lord Townley (designated as lord Loverule by Vanbrugh), and a larger space is afforded to the delineation of those finer feelings which Vanbrugh usually avoided, or only treated with ridicule. Cibber says that Vanbrugh told him in conversation, that it was his intention to turn the lady out of doors in the fifth act, in consequence of her guilty misconduct; but Cibber, who certainly was a reformer, as far as he went, of the morals of the stage, perserved the lady from the offences which Vanbrugh intended she should commit, and was thus enabled to preach a more agreeable and affecting lesson out of her repentance and reconciliation with her husband. That this comedy, as it stands, is entitled to the place which it holds amongst our acting plays, we believe will be generally admitted. Each portion of it is admirable. The entire treatment of the domestic provocations, their progress and issue, would be sufficient alone to confer a high reputation upon Cibber, while, on the other hand, we hardly know any similar passages in any of our comedies, which excel in homely humour, in broad caricature, and rich ridicule of existing manners, those scenes in which sir Francis Wronghead, his servant Moody, and the rest of his hopeful household are introduced. But it cannot fail

to strike the critical spectator, that while the interest attached to the characters of lord and lady Townley is deep and permanent, and as likely to fascinate the next age as it does the present, the satire of the Wronghead party is becoming every day less and less palpable to the bulk of the audience. Now this distinction marks with accuracy the kind of excellence that may on the whole be attributed to sir John Vanbrugh's plays. They were adapted to the living generation; they pourtrayed prevailing habits and manners; they showed the forms which the vices of society assumed in his day; and they were faithful, witty, and clever reflections of existing characters and evanescent fashions, coloured all throughout with a most profane licentiousness, which rendered them still more acceptable to the audiences for whom they were written, and still less acceptable to those who came after them. The union of two such plots in one comedy certainly cannot be commended as a proof of much judgment on the part of Cibber, who might have easily foreseen that there was at least a chance that the temporary satire might ultimately, as it faded in attraction, draw down into oblivion the worthier scenes with which it was bound up; a destiny which has even already been partially accomplished, since there is no doubt that the essential charm of the play, in the estimation of the audiences of the present day, resides in the representation of lord and lady Townley, in comparison with which all the rest is held in indifference. No doubt the comedy will always keep the stage; but in future times, when the whimsical humour of the journey to town shall cease to present any laughable points to the community, and shall be regarded rather as a curious picture of English society at a period when inter-communication was slow and difficult, and when country life was really a life of simplicity and ignorance, we are mistaken if it be not found necessary to modify the whole of Vanbrugh's portion of the play, for the sake of preserving the remainder. But, independently of this objection to the com-

bination of the Townleys and the Wrongheads, a more grave fault is to be brought against it on the ground of taste. They exhibit two distinct plots, the action and results of which are totally separate, being merely linked together by the weakest thread of circumstance, but having no actual connection with each other, so that they might be divorced without doing violence to either. This is a grand error in a play, but especially in a comedy, where discordant events, by distracting the attention, have the effect of diminishing the pleasure. When a double plot is thus introduced, it demands the utmost skill to render it agreeable. A strict harmony ought to subsist between the main and the under plot; they ought not to be too strongly contrasted; and the variety they produce ought to be of a kind which would entertain the audience without bringing before them any great or sudden transitions to jar upon the sense of enjoyment. In *The Provoked Husband*, the serious interviews between lord and lady Townley, and the farcical humours of the country member's family, are so injudiciously brought together, that the spectator feels as if two plays, totally opposite to each other in character, conduct, and sentiment, were alternately presented, scene by scene, upon the stage. It is utterly impossible for the imagination to blend into one series of connected situations the elevated tone of the former, and the burlesque humour of the latter. But for this default in judgment Cibber, and not Vanbrugh, is responsible.

It will be evident from our passing notes on sir John Vanbrugh's comedies, that he did not possess much invention, being chiefly indebted for his plots to other sources, and that his merit as a dramatist lay principally in the ease and sprightliness of his dialogue, which was admirable in its kind. His style, if we may employ the expression, is so catching and colloquial, and the words seem to arise so inevitably out of the occasion, that the ear seizes the progress of the conversation with rapidity, and not unfrequently anticipates it. The

actors of his time observed that there was no dramatic author whose writings gave so little trouble to the memory, which is a marvellous fascination in comedy, imparting to the utterance of the wit something of the brilliant spirit of impromptu. This power over the scene, however, only gave a higher zest to that disgraceful license, in which he indulged beyond all contemporary writers; nor could any remonstrances (and for the honour of the age it ought to be recorded that some remonstrances were made) check him in the course upon which his wilful genius loved to run riot. Instead of acknowledging the justice of the reproofs drawn forth by his stage impurities, he was bold enough to attempt their justification. In his preface to *The Relapse*, he replies to certain charges that had been brought against it of blasphemy and licentiousness, in the following terms: — "For my part I cannot find them out; if there were any obscene expressions upon the stage, here they are in the print; for I have dealt fairly, I have not sunk a syllable, that could (though by racking of mysteries) be ranged under that head; and yet, I believe, with a steady faith, there is not one woman of a real reputation in town, but when she has read it impartially over in her closet, will find it so innocent, she will think it no affront to her prayer book to lay it upon the same shelf." This is the genuine language of the abandoned libertine, who, for the purpose of vindicating his excesses, affects to think that the most virtuous people are as bad as himself.

But, notwithstanding these dramatic transgressions, the private character of Vanbrugh was, perhaps, as irreproachable as that of any man of wit and gallantry of his day. Swift and Pope, who dealt severely with him in their lampoons and satires, did not hesitate to do justice to him upon the publication of their *Miscellanies*, in the preface to which they make atonement for their poetical asperity, by expressing their regret, that they had indulged their raillery against one who was "a man of wit and honour." But the best estimate, in

two or three words, that has been made of him, without entering into the shades of qualities, is in the memorable line of Pope: —

> " How Van wants grace, who never wanted wit."

The want of grace was the defect of the architect, and the inexhaustible wit was the highest merit of the comic poet.

WILLIAM CONGREVE.

(1669—1728.)

The ancestors of William Congreve are said to have held possessions in England before the date of the Norman conquest. Whether they continued to maintain them, or whether the seat of the family was, at that early period, in the county of Stafford, to which the poet's immediate progenitors are traced, is not known, nor is it of much consequence now to determine. The inutility of such researches is manifest enough in the fact, that the ancient members of the Congreve stock, whoever they were, or whatever figure they made in their own time are now entirely forgotten, while the poet alone, of the whole race, is known to the world. Of what use would it be to ascertain and describe the existence of people who did nothing to preserve themselves from obscurity? But the diligence that has been employed to trace them to their origin is one of the rewar[illegible] whi[illegible] grateful posterity bestows upon genius. In the anxiety [illegible] render fitting honours to merit, we som[illegible]es record all the particulars we can glean of its lin[illegible]ge. Thus f[illegible]me no only sheds its steady light [illegible]ugh future ages, but occasionally illumina[illegible] [illegible]e past. It is something, therefore, to have be[illegible] the unconscious ancestor of a great man, as well as to enjoy the transmitted glory of being descended from one.

The place of Congreve's birth, and even its date, was a matter of dispute, until Mr. Malone determined both by the discovery of the entry of his baptism at a place called Bardsa, near Leeds in Yorkshire, where he was born in 1669. He was the second son of Richard Congreve, of Congreve and Stratton, a gentleman who held some military commission, which, soon after the poet was

born, carried him over to Ireland, where he subsequently procured a land-agency on the Burlington estate, that induced him to fix his residence in that country. For a long time it was generally believed that William Congreve was born in Ireland, an assertion which is strongly maintained by sir James Ware, notwithstanding that Jacob, on Congreve's own authority, contradicted the report. Southern, it appears, disbelieved Congreve himself on this point, and, with some asperity, accused him of having disowned the country of his birth ; as if any man of sense was likely to be ashamed of an accident which, of all others that could befall him, it was least in his power to prevent or repair.

He received the rudiments of his education at a public school in Kilkenny, where his father was stationed, and was subsequently entered at Trinity College in Dublin, where the subjoined registry, which settles the dispute about his birthplace, is still preserved — "1685, die quinto Aprilis hora die pomerid. Gulielmus Congreve pensions., filius Guli. Congreve generosi de Youghalia, annos natus sexdecim, natus Bardsagram in Com. Eboracen, educ. Kilkenniæ, sat ferula doct. Hinton. Tutor St. George Ashe." Having made a certain proficiency in his studies at college, where he distinguished himself by the rapidity of his progress, he was sent over to London shortly after the revolution, and entered at the Middle Temple with a view to the profession of the law. Congreve, however, like many other men of genius, who were put forward by their friends to prosecute the study of the statutes, was of too lively a turn for so dry and technical a pursuit, and very soon abandoned it altogether. But although his imagination thus early took that path which he was afterwards destined to adorn, he displayed, at the same time, a rigorous judgment in the choice and use of subjects from which a successful career might have been safely predicated. His first production was a novel, called *The Incognita, or Love and Duty reconciled.* In this work there were none of those marks of haste or extravagance which so frequently

deform the first fruits of the youthful fancy; on the contrary, it discovered a careful taste and a strict adherence to those rules of composition, which, in his opinion, ought to govern such works. The novel is now forgotten, or seldom read; but it may be referred to as an evidence of the critical discretion of the author at an age when the laws of criticism rarely exercise any influence.

The skill and vivacity of mind which were indicated in the novel appeared to still greater advantage in a comedy, called *The Old Bachelor*, which was not only the first piece of this kind written by Congreve, but which would seem, from a passage in the dedication to lord Clifford, to have been the earliest production of his invention. *The Old Bachelor* was not acted until 1693; but Congreve tells us in his reply to the strictures of Collier, that it was composed several years before, when he had little thoughts of the stage, to amuse himself in a slow recovery from a fit of sickness. He is said to have written it while he was on a visit at Bardsa, to a relation of his mother, who possessed an estate there. As it was originally prepared it was found either deficient in some of the requisites for the stage, or, more probably, presented some redundancies; but its merits were considered by Dryden, who declared that he had never seen such a *first* play, to be of so high an order, that he, Southern, and Mainwairing revised and adapted it for the actors. The success of the performance justified the favourable opinions that had been pronounced upon it in the first instance, and brought the author at once into notice. Lord Halifax, who, whatever may be thought of his judgment in literary matters, was undoubtedly the Mæcenas of his day, immediately became the patron of the young dramatist, and gave him at once a substantial proof of his friendship by appointing him to a commissionership for licensing hackney coaches, and subsequently to a place in the excise, and another in the customs, from which he derived 600*l.* per annum. Congreve's conversation, observes Dr.

Johnson dryly, must surely have been at least equally pleasing with his writings.

We are not acquainted with any instance in the whole range of dramatic poetry, in which an author's first production so completely imaged forth the style and character of his subsequent writings as the instance of this comedy. Congreve seems at once to have framed the model, which he continued to keep in view throughout all his pieces. If we dissect the elements of *The Old Bachelor*, we shall find them precisely of the same class as those of his more matured plays, and the only difference that exists between all, is in the diversity of the plots and characters, and the more exquisite finish of the dialogue which increased experience and study enabled him to bestow upon his later dramas. But the plan upon which he wrote all his comedies is the same. Dr. Johnson, speaking of *The Old Bachelor*, says "the dialogue is one constant reciprocation of conceits, a clash of wit, in which nothing flows necessarily from the occasion, or is dictated by nature. The characters both of men and women are either fictitious and artificial, as those of Heartwell and the ladies, or easy and common as Wittol a tame idiot, Bluffe a swaggering coward, and Fondlewife a jealous puritan; and the catastrophe arises from a mistake, not very probably produced, by marrying a woman in a mask." These observations, varied only in reference to the characters, would apply with equal justice to all Congreve's comedies.

Unlike Wycherley, who drew directly upon human life, which he heightened in the representation by wit, Congreve fused whatever he took from nature in the alembic of his imagination, and brought it out in an artificial shape. Wycherley employed his wit to illustrate life—Congreve resorted to life only as a means of displaying his wit. The merit of his characters, and the amusing contrivances of his plots—both of which are frequently excellent—must always be regarded to be of inferior interest to the brilliant rencontres of the dialogue. If we were to test his comedies by their pro-

babilities, we should find them wanting in the main ingredient; but if we test them by their mere power of entertainment, without caring to inquire into the means by which the effect is wrought, we must pronounce them to be inimitable. It is true that no men and women ever kept up such an incessant play of repartees as the men and women of his comedies; but it is his peculiar felicity to reconcile us to that which we know to be unreasonable by the consummate art with which he conducts it. This quality is remarkably developed in *The Old Bachelor*. In his later comedies he carried it to greater perfection; but in none of them is the system upon which he built up his scenes more clearly displayed.

In the following year he produced *The Double Dealer*, the least successful of his comedies. The reason of the failure of this play upon the stage may be easily detected in the regularity of its constitution, and which not even the gaiety and frivolity of some of its characters could induce the audience to approve. In the dedication of the comedy to the right honourable Charles Montagu, Congreve defended the piece on the ground that he had endeavoured to render it a "true and regular comedy;" but truth and regularity in a comedy are not synonymous terms, and may subsist quite independently of each other. He observes, that the mechanical part of it is regular; and adds, that he designed the moral first, and to that moral invented the fable, and that he made the plot single to avoid confusion and preserve the three unities of the drama. This defence of the play only serves to make the matter worse. It is by no means necessary that the plot of a comedy should be single in order to avoid confusion, which arises not from the business of the play but from the obscurity of the author. By the singleness of the plot, perspicuity may or may not be attained, since that desirable quality must still depend upon the treatment; but we are yet to learn that confusion is inseparable from variety, which Congreve must have meant by this novel justification of

his design, if, indeed, he meant any thing more than an ingenious attempt to cover his original error, by diverting the controversy into a question of abstract criticism, upon which the public were not likely to follow him.

The reliance upon the unities is not more fortunate than the mode of escaping confusion; first, because it is by no means certain that a comedy would be true to nature in proportion as it fulfilled the exactions of the unities; and second, because *The Double Dealer*, to which the argument is applied, does not fulfil them. We are consequently saved the necessity of entering upon the debatable ground to which the poet's defence of his work invites us, by the fact that his defence does not apply to the thing defended. The last three scenes of the third act of *The Double Dealer* are mere conversations entirely superfluous to the story, during the progress of which the action of the play is completely suspended. In espousing the unities therefore, by way of justifying the conduct of the piece, Congreve evidently leads the reader astray; for, although two of the unities are observed with sufficient care, one of them is palpably violated.

The critics of the day objected, amongst other points, to the use of soliloquies in this comedy, and also to the immorality of the female characters. Congreve vindicates both; the former by a reference to the necessity under which the dramatist is placed of revealing to the audiences the thoughts of the speaker; and the latter, by the obvious truth, that immorality exists amongst some women in real life. In these arguments we are permitted to see how a good dramatic poet may be a very bad logician. Surely the necessity of revealing to the audience the thoughts of a person in the scene, does not establish the propriety of revealing them in soliloquy, since we know that there are a hundred other ways by which they can be revealed; and the existence of immorality in real life does not vindicate the choice of particular kinds of immorality for the uses of the stage, since, if the mere existence of a crime were enough to justify its dramatic employment, there is no description

of crime whatever which it would not be legitimate to exhibit in the theatre.

The sophistry of the author could neither create favour for the comedy, nor conceal the causes of its failure. The want of incidents growing up out of each other, so as to sustain a continuous progress of the interest, and the intermixture of some very grave vices, rather heavily delineated, with scenes of the shallowest foppery, were felt to be both dull and inconsistent. The experiment of what Congreve called a "true and regular comedy," appears to have been, after this attempt, completely abandoned by the poet. We do not find him again insisting upon the maintenance of rules that run so adverse to nature and popularity.*

Betterton now opened the new theatre in Lincoln's-inn-fields, and Congreve, anticipating that it would be a favourable opportunity for regaining whatever credit he might have lost by the *Double Dealer*, produced at that house his comedy of *Love for Love* in the year 1695. The reception of this piece answered the most sanguine expectations that could have been founded on it. With considerable extravagance in the characters, and perhaps some improbability in the plot, such was the effect of its airy and brilliant dialogue, its amusing contrasts, and the bustle of the scenes, that it became at once one of the most popular productions of the day. Tempted by success, and induced probably by his association with Betterton, the best tragedian then living, to try another walk of the drama, Congreve followed up this comedy, at the same house, with the tragedy of *The Mourning Bride* in 1697. This play was not originally produced exactly as it has come down to us. The poet, in his maturer years, revised the versification, and improved some passages in the dialogue; but the alterations he made being merely in verbal points, we may

* Queen Mary is said to have thought so well of *The Double Dealer* and *The Old Bachelor*, as to attend the representations of both. But her example did not convert the public. When she died, Congreve wrote a melancholy pastoral on her memory He could not do less; she approved of an indifferent play, and he expressed his gratitude in worse poetry.

fairly conclude that it stands now nearly as it was written. The action of the tragedy is stirring, and calculated to strike the imagination of the spectator: but this is the highest merit that can be awarded to it. The dialogue is not conceived with the energy of deep feeling, but rather with the energy of labouring art; the characters are not moulded out of the occasion, but seem to be set in it for a special purpose: what they do is done at the height of a declamatory style, and although the scenes do not contain any thing that is actually irrelevant, yet they contain so much that the audience cannot help thinking more about the events than the passions they generate. There are, however, some parts of *The Mourning Bride* which, taken apart from the rest, exhibit so much true elevation of spirit, that Dr. Johnson selects a fragment of one of the scenes as being the most "poetical paragraph" in the whole mass of English poetry.

But that which is remarkable in this as well as in his former pieces is the fact, to which some of his biographers have drawn attention, that they were all produced before he had passed his twenty-eighth year.* The three comedies we have enumerated were produced before he was twenty-six. If they do not exhibit much actual acquaintance with life, but rather with life as it is described in novels and plays, they nevertheless develope an amount of observation which, whatever might have been the materials upon which it was excercised, cannot fail to be regarded with surprise and admiration in so young a writer. *The Mourning Bride* is in this respect the least wonderful of them all. The spirit in which it is composed does not discover much originality, and still less knowledge of human character. It is a tragedy only according to the conventions of the stage, but not a tragedy of profound passion. His comedies, on the other hand, if they are not natural in the comprehensive sense, embody much of the fleeting traits of society, and

* Dr. Johnson makes Congreve only twenty-five when he produced *The Mourning Bride*; but the date of his birth had not then been correctly ascertained.

at least touch upon the surface many of those topics that divert the attention of the frivolous and the fashionable. If the characters are overdrawn and refined into the mere glittering playthings of wit, instead of being the representatives of classes or the creatures of circumstances, they deal in the affairs of life, notwithstanding that their language is too volatile and ethereal for the atmosphere in which they move. It is not difficult to assign the tragedy to the season of youth, because its faults belong to that season; but it is not easy to ascribe to youth the merits of the comedies, because few experienced minds could have achieved them.

The licentiousness of Congreve's plays, however, did not escape severe reprehension amongst the judicious few. His wit was little more than a mask for pleasure indulging in a round of vices. He seemed to have caught something of the mirth of Wycherley, but he transcends him in the refinement of his levity. Wycherley was more coarse, but he was at the same time more powerful and true; Congreve, not quite so gross, was more seductive and unchaste, and less vigorous and natural. Whether it was any special mischief in the comedies of Congreve, or in the plays of Dryden, and the other dramatists of the time, or the character of the theatres generally, that provoked the celebrated Jeremy Collier* to assail the stage at this juncture, it

* Jeremy Collier, one of the most remarkable men of his time, was born at Stow Qui, or Quire, in Cambridgeshire, in 1650. His father, who was a clergyman, sent him at nineteen years of age to Cambridge University, where he was entered as a poor scholar of Caius College. After taking out his degree of M.A., he was ordained a deacon in 1676, and priested in the following year by the bishop of London. He officiated for some time at the dowager countess of Dorset's, at Knowle in Kent, and next obtained the rectory of Ampton in Suffolk, from whence he removed to London in 1685, and became a lecturer in Gray's Inn. When the revolution took place in 1688, he refused to take the oaths to the new government, was incapacitated from holding church preferments, and became at once an active and violent partisan His first treatise was a defence of James II. against a pamphlet written by Gilbert Burney. For this publication he was sent to Newgate, but was afterwards liberated without being brought to trial He was now regarded as a persecuted patriot by his own party, and every thing he wrote was read with intense interest. A multitude of pamphlets followed, in rapid succession, from his pen, in which the doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance were discussed with more zeal than prudence. Suspicion fell upon his movements; and, it being supposed that he maintained a secret correspondence with the exiled king, he was seized, examined before the earl of Nottingham, and committed a prisoner to the

is not very material to inquire; but at the very moment when Congreve was at the height of his reputation, Collier published (1698) his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage, together with the Sense of Antiquity upon this Argument;* a work which has acquired perennial notoriety for its author. In this production the fierce and able controversialist attacked all the contemporary dramatists, exposed with great power and dexterity the lurking poison of their writings, and supported his case by such proofs of the immoral tendency of the stage, selected not only from the plays of his own but of former ages, that he may be said to have carried public opinion along with him. The times were much altered since Prynne published his *Histriomastix.*

The stage, after having been so long suppressed, received its freedom with perhaps too much exultation ; and it is not to be denied that it gradually assumed the bold airs of a chartered libertine. Collier, an uncompromising nonjuror, saw the weak points

Gate-house. Evidence, however, being wanted against him, he was in a short time released on bail, and afterwards, on submitting to redeem his bail, he was granted his liberty in full Upon all these circumstances he wrote fresh pamphlets. At last, in 1696, he had the boldness, jointly with two nonjuring clergymen, to absolve openly, in the most solemn manner, at the place of public execution, sir John Friend and sir William Perkins, who had been condemned to death for being concerned in the assassination plot. This proceeding was declared to be insolent and inconsistent with the constitution of the church of England, which drew forth another fierce vindication from Collier, whose courage was at least equal to his indiscretion. The result of this defence of an imprudent act was another prosecution, which, in consequence of his flight from justice, ended in outlawry. But the government was content to press the matter no farther, and to leave him for the rest of his life in that state of legal incapacity. He now published, successively, three volumes of Moral Essays, and assailed the stage in his well-known *Short View, &c.* His next work, was a translation of Moreri's great historical dictionary, to which he added a supplement and appendix, which was followed by various productions, the principal of which was an Ecclesiastical History of England, from the planting of Christianity, to the end of the reign of Charles II. It appears that he was frequently offered preferment in the church if he would abandon his nonjuring principles, but he rejected all temptations of that sort, and remained firm to his party to the end. He was now secretly consecrated a bishop by Dr. Hickes of Thetford, an honour which he lived to enjoy thirteen years. He died in 1726, in the seventy-sixth year of his age. His character, notwithstanding his vehemence, was that of an exemplary virtuous man. His intrepidity would have conferred honour on any cause, although his imprudence must have in an equal degree endangered its security.

upon which he might readily assail the drama, without raising an outcry of popular prejudices; and the fearlessness with which he entered the field, alarmed his opponents in as great a degree as it attracted the attention of the public. There was no man better qualified to scourge the licentiousness of the stage. He was indifferent alike to censure and applause; his language was vehement, powerful, and pointed, frequently inelegant, but always forcible. He was a perfect master of satire; and, with a caustic wit, an enthusiastic temperament, considerable learning, invincible obstinacy, and a courage that defeat could only inflame, he poured out upon the drama and its professors a measure of wrath and sarcastic criticism that, for the first time, gave a distinct and tangible shape to the misgivings of the public. He directly attacked the plays of Dryden, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and almost all the wits and poetasters who contributed to the theatres, down to the lowest scribbler amongst them; and, by accumulating in one revolting mass a variety of specimens culled from the most offensive scenes, he established the charge of profligacy to the clear conviction of the major part of the community. The book no sooner appeared than Collier discovered that he had plunged his hand into a nest of hornets. An hundred stings were discharged at him at once. Congreve, a young poet, elated with success, and somewhat too confident in his own powers, started up, and hurled a contemptuous reply at the accuser; but Collier was too tough to be brought to the ground by the grace and flexibility of so volatile an opponent. Congreve was a poor controvertist, notwithstanding the brilliancy with which he fenced, and the tone of security he put on. He equalled Collier only in his rage; and must have been disgracefully beaten even on the score of abuse, but that he stole his weapons out of his antagonists's armoury. He returned railing for railing, and called Collier as many hard names as Collier had called him and his contemporaries. But

the struggle was useless. Collier had truth on his side, and neither the contemptuous silence of Dryden, (who, on this occasion, was prudent enough to keep out of harm's way,) nor the angry skirmishing answers of Congreve, Vanbrugh, Drake, Filmer, and others, could shake the steady nonjuror from his position. Collier replied as fast as they retorted upon him, increasing, with every fresh charge, his legion of overwhelming facts. Thus the contest was prolonged through a period of ten years *, during which time, however, it became evident that Collier's opponents, while, for their credit sake, they continued to deny the truth and justice of his satire, were compelled to submit to its influence. The character of the stage underwent a gradual but important change; the outward licentiousness was considerably abated; and the privileges of comedy became, by common consent, restrained within more modest and judicious bounds. Collier, therefore, had the satisfaction of achieving a victory which, if not as complete as he could have desired, was certainly more complete than, under the circumstances, he could reasonably have expected. The stage, not wholly purified, was to a certain extent reformed. Collier demanded more, and is justly accused of betraying a bitter and sectarian spirit in this controversy; but it must be remembered that the skilful surgeon "cuts beyond the wound" to make good his cure. He exhibited, no doubt, a merciless enmity against the stage; but had he been more tender, is it likely that he would have been equally successful?

* Collier's original work was published in 1698. The answers it provoked called him out again in the following year, when he published *A Defence of the Short View, &c., being a Reply to Mr. Congreve's Amendments, &c. and to the Vindication of the Author of the Relapse.* In 1700, he was again in the field with *A Second Defence of the Short View, &c., being a Reply to the book, entitled 'The Ancient and Modern Stages surveyed,' &c.* An interval of repose now succeeded, when, in 1703, he appeared again with a work, entitled *Mr. Collier's Dissuasion from the Playhouse, in a Letter to a Person of Quality, occasioned by the late Calamity of the Tempest, &c.*; and in 1708, exactly ten years after the date of the publication of the *Short View*, we find him closing the discussion with *A Farther Short View, &c. in which the objections of a late book, entitled 'A Defence of Plays,' are considered.*

While this controversy was yet going forward, but upwards of a year after he had published his *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, &c.*, the ill-success of which induced him to abandon the argument, Congreve produced his comedy of *The Way of the World* at Lincoln's Inn. This was in 1700. The care bestowed upon the play is evident; and he seems to insinuate in the dedication that it cost him unusual pains. Yet, although the dialogue is elaborated with the utmost finish, and the story is contrived with ingenuity, the audience ventured to differ from the author's estimate of his own work, and to think that that which was indebted for its excellence solely to the closet, could not please upon the stage. The *fillagree* work of Congreve's wit presented too fine a web for the multitude; they required a bolder texture, which might be approached with less caution, and more quickly understood and relished in all its parts. They treated it, therefore, with cold neglect, which Congreve resented by a resolution never to write for the stage again. He thought the audience either capricious or ignorant, or both, and determined to give them no more opportunities of venting their humours, or exposing their want of judgment upon any labours of his invention in that way. "Comedy," says Dennis, who sometimes said a good thing by accident, "left the stage with him." That Congreve regarded the treatment shown to *The Way of the World* as a piece of unparalleled injustice, arising entirely from the incapability of the audience to appreciate its merits, may be gathered from the ostentatious and ornate comparison he draws in the dedication (to which we have already referred) between Terence and Plautus, clearly designing that he should be understood in this case as the Terence slighted by the crowd. "The purity of his style," he observes, "the delicacy of his turns, and the justness of his characters, were all of them beauties, which the greater part of his audience were incapable of tasting; some of the coarsest strokes of Plautus, so severely censured by Horace, were more

likely to affect the multitude; such who came with the expectation to laugh at the last act of a play, and are better entertained with two or three unseasonable jests, than with the artful solution of the fable." The whole of this dedication is written in a temper of petulant dignity, that looks very like the leave-taking of an offended favourite, who forgot, in a single slight, a world of by-gone obligations. That he really was determined to write no more for the theatre is proved by the fact itself, for his two slender, nondescript, operatic masques of *The Judgment of Paris* and *Semele,* cannot be considered as dramatic pieces, notwithstanding that the *Biographia Dramatica* asserts that they are. *Semele,* which was brought out in 1707, is not only unfortunate in the subject, but discovers such mixed modes in the management, that it is difficult to decide whether it is intended to be serious, or comic, or pastoral, or altogether lyrical. It is, perhaps the most unmanageable composition, looking at it in reference to the stage, that ever was written. Warton expresses some wonder at the stage direction, which brings the third act to a conclusion; this is scarcely surprising, for the catastrophe, which runs as follows, seems almost to be a leaf stolen from *The Rehearsal* or *The Critic:*—"As the cloud which contains Jupiter is arrived just over the canopy of Semele, a sudden and great flash of lightning breaks forth, and a clap of thunder is heard; when, at one instant, Semele with the palace and the whole present scene disappears, and Jupiter re-ascends quickly. The scene, totally changed, represents a pleasant country, mount Citheron closing the prospect." The masque of *The Judgment of Paris* has still fewer pretensions to be considered as a dramatic production: it consists of a single scene and a single incident, and is literally composed of about half a dozen songs.

At the time Congreve retired from these agreeable labours, to which he was indebted for the great success that had followed him, he was only thirty-one years of age — a period when other men have done little more

than begun to sow the seeds of their future reputation. His fame was already established; he had already reaped as much worldly advantage from it as he could hope to attain; and the love of ease naturally ensued upon the acquisition of the means of insuring its enjoyment. He did not, however, entirely forsake the muses. He occasionally wrote verses upon particular events; songs, panegyrics, and short translations. "He has in these pieces," says a writer, who may be admitted to have finally disposed of Congreve's claims as a poet, "neither elevation of fancy, selection of language, nor skill of versification;" to which the writer might have added the want of imagination, tact, and feeling. It is indeed surprising that a dramatist, whose plays are crowded with such sparkling conceits, should become so dull and leaden whenever he ventured into verse. But, although he did not excel in the practice of the art, he was an excellent judge of it in others. Thus, if his Pindaric ode to queen Anne, on the victories of Marlborough, be but a feeble and empty performance, the discourse with which he introduces it is a piece of sound criticism, which, at that time, was especially valuable, since it exposed the popular fallacy that existed concerning the odes of Pindar, and showed that they possessed unbroken symmetry and regularity throughout.

In 1710 Congreve published a collection of his plays and miscellaneous poems, which he dedicated to his patron, the earl of Halifax. The direct course of his life was now undisturbed by any remarkable occurrences; and, after this time, he was not drawn from his privacy even into the literary correspondence of the day. Enabled by the places he held to maintain that position of elegant tranquillity which he most coveted, and being of an inexpensive habit, the temptation to resume the toil of invention were not sufficient to seduce him. In society he was surrounded by universal respect, which neither the contentions of the wits, nor the war of parties, tended to shake or diminish. Steele

esteemed him so highly, that he inscribed his *Miscellany* to him; and Pope was proud of the opportunity, which the dedication of the *Iliad* afforded him, of "having the honour and satisfaction of placing together his own name and that of Mr. Congreve." These were great honours; and his political opponents were not less anxious to testify their admiration of his character than his private friends. When the tories succeeded in displacing the whigs, some apprehensions were expressed that Congreve would suffer in his appointments by exchange; upon which the earl of Oxford answered, —

> "Non obtusa adeo gestamus pectora Pœni,
> Nec tam aversus equos Tyriâ sol jungit ab urbe."

The whigs could not do less than promote the fortunes of an adherent, who, like the house of Pindar, was thus honoured by the enemy, and accordingly, when they returned to office, they appointed him to the sinecure place of secretary to the island of Jamaica, by which his official income was raised to about 1200*l* per annum. It ought to be recorded, in connection with these acts of liberality on both sides, that Congreve continued to the last faithful to the person and party of his patron lord Halifax.

Of his particular mode of life we know nothing, except that he was indolent and economical. Whether his frugality sprang from the simplicity of his taste, or from avarice, cannot be determined; but it is certain that he never married, and that he saved a large sum of money. Living in a time when it was the fashion to be witty in conversation; and when men of genius depended upon the sprightliness of their manners for one half of their favour with the public, Congreve alone seems to have made no impression whatever that way; but to have been content with the character of vivacity he had infused into his comedies. He stood apart from the gay crowd, folded up in a species of false dignity like some superior nature, that in a freak had set the

world laughing, and then retired to enjoy with cynic contempt the ridiculous entertainment of which he had been the source. This is the worst part of Congreve's character. and, for several reasons, inexplicable. He disowned his productions — or rather, the reputation they brought — without expressly exhibiting regret for having written them, which could be the only rational pretext for being ashamed of them. Voltaire relates a story of having, while he was in England, paid a visit to Congreve, then in the decline of life, and happening to introduce, in a complimentary way, an allusion to his writings, Congreve waived the subject, by observing, that he expected to be visited only as a gentleman, and not as an author. The Frenchman instantly replied, that had Mr. Congreve been so unfortunate as to have been merely a gentleman, he, Voltaire, would never have troubled him with a visit. This feeling was probably the foible of old age; for, although there is a tone of exclusiveness every where in Congreve's dedications and familiar compositions from the first piece to the last, and although his comedies are utterly wanting in warmth and cordiality, yet he had much of the sentiment and expression of a scholar and reader about him; and it is difficult to comprehend how such a man could ever have been ashamed of being an author. The distinction too between an author and a gentleman is not very intelligible, and would also seem to belong to that time of life, when the faculties begin to lose their vigour, and objects are no longer discriminated with accuracy. That Congreve believed a gentleman to be something over and above an author is clear enough, from his desire to be thought a gentleman merely; yet what a vast number of gentleman there are in the world who could as soon conjure the sun out of the heavens as become authors, while the authors, like Congreve himself, can lay down their authorship and take up the gentleman at will. But perhaps the muse of Congreve blushed in the presence of Voltaire (for which she had abundant cause), and took this method of escaping from

explanations and disowning her sins. However it was, Voltaire heartily despised his affectation, and posterity will confirm the justice of his contempt.

Towards the end of his life Congreve suffered severely from cataracts in his eyes, which terminated in total blindness. This great calamity — the greatest that can befall a man of letters—was rendered still more painful by repeated attacks of gout, which completely broke down his constitution. For these accumulated ailments he was recommended to try the waters of Bath; but on his journey thither, an accident occurred which overturned his carriage. This misfortune produced a violent pain in his side, which remained with him to the last; and, no doubt, hastened his dissolution, which took place in the 60th year of his age, on the 29th of January, 1728-9, at his house in Surrey-street in the Strand. His body was laid out in the Jerusalem Chamber, and he was interred with great funereal solemnity in Wesminster Abbey, where a monument was erected to his memory by Henrietta, duchess of Marlborough. It is said that this lady entertained a romantic attachment for him, which is not improbable, since he bequeathed his whole fortune, 10,000*l.*, the amount of the savings of his life, to her grace, although his own family, reduced by indiscretion, stood in need of his assistance.

Congreve's merit as a poet lies wholly in his dramas. His pieces in all other walks are affected and laboured. His comedies alone constitute that claim upon the admiration of his countrymen, which is never likely to be disputed. The school of comedy he may be said to have formed, has no foundation in actual life, but derives its charm exclusively from the perfection of an artificial style. His comedies are wanting in traits of real nature, in simplicity, in individual character subsisting by its intrinsic force, and in broad effects; but they exhibit, in a higher state of excellence than can be found anywhere else, a perpetual vein of wit, which glows in such incessant flashes over the surface, that we cannot, if we would, penetrate beneath to examine

the slight *matériel* it conceals. With Congreve every thing is artificial — his fops, sharpers, coquettes, libertines; they are all drawn in excess, to afford a wider scope to the play of the brilliant dialogue. His men for the most part are utterly destitute of honour, and his women insensible to shame. The innate grossness of his pictures would be unendurable, were it not relieved by the ingenious perplexity of his plots, which are always original, and a gaiety of expression which never flags. His personages lose something of their distinctness by the universality of this spirit. They all speak the same language of pointed sarcasm and rapid epigram, varied only by outward, but not essential, differences of style. Hence Pope doubts if the fools of Congreve really are fools, they talk so well: —

> "Tell me if Congreve's fools are fools indeed."

But the exquisite reticulation of the dialogue, the surprises and retorts, the prolonged contests, the glitter and flutter, the airy voluptuousness, the starry sophistry, the grace, the spiritual levity, and intellectual ambush-shooting of his scenes, have never been equalled; and, owing to the excess and prodigality of wit, are not likely to be imitated. Sheridan, at a considerable distance, copied after him; but Sheridan, with a little more nature, had also more artifice, and a great deal less wit; he might have approached nearer to truth, had he kept farther from Congreve.

Comedies, so finely executed, require the highest powers in the representation to bring out all their minute effects. The actors must be in a full tide of animal spirits to carry onward, with the necessary rapidity, the sparkling hilarity of the dialogue. This is a difficulty which, more than any other, excludes these plays from the stage. Their licentiousness might be compromised, as has been done with tolerable success in two instances, *Love for Love*, and *The Way of the World*, — but it would still demand a combination of

rare talents to produce them with the requisite gusto in the theatre. *Love for Love* is still occasionally played, but at distant intervals. Perhaps, we ought to add, that the world would have nothing to regret in the total banishment of these comedies from the playhouse, since, whatever may be, their merits, it is impossible to disguise their immorality.

GEORGE FARQUHAR.

(1678—1707.)

The period in the annals of the English stage, when modern comedy may be said to have reached the height of excellence, was that which began with Wycherley and ended with Farquhar. Within that period — dismissing from consideration all the minor poets — lived the four greatest masters of comedy to which our theatre lays claim. These were Wycherley, Vanbrugh, Congreve, and Farquhar, who, with strong individualities that distinguished them from each other, present many traits in common, speaking the same mother-tongue of wit, seizing upon the same foibles and follies of their age, and employing the same weapons of satire and ridicule to instruct and entertain. Of these writers Wycherley was the first in point of time; and, as we have already observed in his biography, is entitled to be regarded as the founder of the mixed comedy of nature and manners, as Etherege was of what was then, and is still, called genteel comedy. Vanbrugh deviated so far into mere licentiousness that much of the permanent elements of truth which his plays contain is disguised under grossness; but still he belongs to the same class. Congreve, with a more sparkling wit than either, united, in some degree, the peculiar attributes of both; but he was neither so true to life as the one, nor so demoralizing as the other. Farquhar had a more lively fancy, greater versatility, and a swifter sense of the ridiculous than any of his predecessors, and by a felicitous combination of qualities produced plays that are more likely to maintain their place upon the stage, although they are not built of such profound materials. The four dramatists may be con-

sidered to have been nearly contemporaneous, or to have flourished so close to each other as to have witnessed the better parts of each other's triumphs. Wycherley was born twenty-six years before Vanbrugh, who survived him only eleven years, during which time Vanbrugh had ceased to write for the stage; — he was born twenty-nine years before Congreve, who survived him only fourteen years, and had ceased to write for the stage for upwards of twenty years before his death; — and he was born thirty-eight years before Farquhar, and outlived his short-lived junior eight years. Thus Wycherley witnessed the productions of his three successors, while they, in turn, followed fast upon each other. The exhibition of the years in which they severally were born and died will show how near an influence they must have mutually exercised: —

Wycherley was born in		1640	and died in	1715.
Vanbrugh	-	1666	-	1726.
Congreve	-	1669	-	1729.
Farquhar	-	1678	-	1707.

With the last of these poets comedy may be said to have fallen asleep, and to have been only slightly disturbed at long intervals in her deep slumber by Cibber, Hoadley, Colman the elder, and Sheridan.

A new school of comedy was subsequently formed, and for a long time held possession of the stage. It does not properly fall under the subject of this notice; but as it is not embraced within the limits to which the present volume is necessarily confined, it may not be inappropriate to allude to it briefly. For the sake, perhaps, of distinction, no less than because the phrase is apt, this school has been designated Sentimental Comedy. The Euphues of Lyly was scarcely more unnatural and preposterous, although no kind of resemblance exists between them.

This maudlin and farcical description of drama consists chiefly of motley and highly exaggerated characters, that are made to flicker through a variety of artificial situations and mechanical equivoques, such as are fre-

quently met with in the slip-slop novels of the last century, while a low, grovelling humour threads the scenes to relieve with grimace and caricature the simpering tenderness of the serious super-humanity of the upper parts. These personages have a certain sort of nature in them, — a stage nature that has been suffered to grow into use by the mere force of novelty and clap-trap, and that at last assumed an air of conventional propriety, through the influence of habit and repetition. In order to make an acceptable hero for a comedy of this kind, it was necessary to bestow upon the individual a combination of all the amiable attributes that were to be found in real life, and a great many more supplied by the writer's invention, and strained into ecstasy by an extra infusion of sympathy. This monster of goodness was created to bathe one side of the comedy's face with tears, while the stranger compounds of the ridiculous contributed their grotesque humours to wrinkle the other side with grimaces. In this way the audience were alternately overcome with pity, or convulsed with laughter, — the real end and aim of comedy, being all the time kept ingeniously out of view. The perfection of the play consisted in its extravagance upon all points. It flowered over with hyperboles; generosity, avarice, fickleness, constancy, good-nature, malice, vivacity, taciturnity, pride, humility, all the virtues and all the vices actually went to seed in its heated and fertile soil. How the public came originally to receive and encourage this species of production, it is difficult to determine; but there is no doubt that it was indebted to the actors for the term of existence it enjoyed. The characters were drawn so strikingly, — they afforded such favourable opportunities for the display of stage-trick, — and they were so crowded with taking and popular sentiments, that the actors, for their own sakes, were glad to perpetuate, as long as they could, a form of entertainment, which yielded them such an agreeable means of drawing down thunders of applause. Most of the comic parts in these pieces were *ad libitum* parts, written

for particular performers, and which, hitting off their peculiarities with felicity and adroitness, were sure to be made the most of in the representation. In short it was the actors in such plays, and not the plays, which seem to have exorcised the judgment of the public; and the consequence has been that, as the favourite actors, who flourished so rankly in them, died off, the plays themselves gradually disappeared. The honour of having originally introduced the sentimental comedy may be ascribed to Mr. Hugh Kelly, a native of Ireland, who was born on the banks of Killarney, in the year 1739, and who came to London on the expiration of his apprenticeship, to look for employment in the trade to which he was indentured,—that of a staymaker. Out of this origin not much was to be expected, the more especially as Mr. Kelly had received nothing more than the rudiments of a common education, and had never enjoyed any opportunities of compensating for his deficiencies by mixing with society. But there is no explaining the mystery of genius. Disappointed in his expectations of making a fortune in the business to which he was bred, by an obvious transition he turned his attention to the stage. This was the *erratum* in his book of life,—for *stays* read *plays*. Mr. Garrick, whose discernment was unimpeachable, was induced by an accidental circumstance to peruse a comedy written by Kelly, and was so impressed with its capabilities,—(Mr. Garrick, the author and critic, it must be remembered, was also a manager and an actor),—that he brought it upon the stage. It was called *False Delicacy*, and was received with considerable applause. Such, indeed, was the success of the comedy, that it was rapidly translated into nearly every European language, and acted at almost all the continental theatres. This piece may be historically set down as the first complete specimen of the sentimental style. But Kelly merely pointed out the track, and left others to pursue the chase with a more prosperous issue. The younger Colman, who was capable of better things, and

who now and then accomplished them, followed eagerly in the steps of the new fashion, bringing fresh vigour, and a larger experience to enrich its morbid features; and in the hands of Reynolds and Morton it was brought to that state of high pressure that exhaustion at length set in, and it may now, we hope, be considered to have worn out its feeble and feverish life. But it is time to return to the immediate subject of this biography.

George Farquhar was descended from a respectable family in the north of Ireland, where his father held a living of only 150*l.* per annum, agreeably to one authority, and, according to another, was dean of Armagh. He is said to have been one of seven children, and was born in the city of Londonderry in 1678. After passing through the ordinary course of school education in his native city, he was entered as a sizer in Trinity College, Dublin, on the 17th July 1694. It appears, that although he very early discovered a genius for poetry, he had but an indifferent talent for the drudgery of books. The college course was either above or averse to his capacity, and while he was yet but a stripling he was so often detected in moods of abstraction and reverie, that he gradually acquired the reputation of being the dullest scholar in the university. Even as a companion, it is said, that he was taciturn and repulsive in his manners. But of these circumstances we do not possess any satisfactory vouchers. Mediocrity frequently takes its revenge upon genius by denying it the possession of those qualities of labour and perseverance which belong to less enthusiastic natures, employing its listlessness and thoughtful temperament as proofs of indolence and want of sense; while the idleness and vanities of common minds are allowed to glide unobserved through the world. There is no doubt, however, that Farquhar got into discredit from some cause or another, since, whatever might have been the reason, he certainly left college in the year after he entered it. We are informed by one writer, who asserts that he had the authority of an intimate friend of Mr. Farquhar's for the fact, that

Farquhar received from his tutor a college exercise, the subject of which was our Saviour's miracle of turning the water into wine; and that, upon coming into the hall next day for examination, it was discovered that he had not written his exercise; whereupon, says the narrator, the lecturer being displeased, Farquhar offered to make an extemporaneous exercise; and, after a pause, began by observing that he thought it no great miracle, since the man that is born to be hanged, &c.* This piece of impiety (which, it must be admitted, has a dash of Farquhar's daring wit in it), excited so much indignation that, "upon the next sitting," our young Satan was formally expelled. Now, there are so many improbabilities within the short compass of this little story, that we must venture to question its veracity altogether. In the first place, the writing of themes of this sort to be examined in the hall of the college "next day," seems to be either some extraordinary mistake on the part of the retailer of the anecdote, or a piece of pure invention—it is impossible to decide which. Then the expulsion at the next sitting is equally apocryphal, or the gentleman who told the story was a very slovenly storyteller. Another biographer, apparently puzzled by these difficulties, contents himself with leaving the doubt where he found it, and dismisses this somewhat important incident in the life of the poet by observing, that Farquhar "either eloped or was expelled, in consequence of irregular conduct." If we were to judge of this his first step, by the character of the remainder of his career, the former supposition might be assumed to be true in preference to the latter, since Farquhar was one of those volatile spirits who would be more likely to fly from restraints, than to resist them. But we are enabled, by a better authority than any of them, to assign his departure from college to a still more reasonable

* This anecdote will probably remind the reader of a similar passage in the juvenile life of another English poet, who, upon the same theme, wrote the celebrated and marvellous line:—

"The conscious water saw its god, and blushed."

cause than wildness or impiety, namely, the death of Dr. Wiseman, bishop of Dromore, who was his friend and patron, and with whom expired those prospects, in reference to which Farquhar was no doubt placed at the university by his friends.

Immediately after he left the college, being cast upon the choice of a profession, and having but slender hopes from his family, he consulted his own taste, and presented himself to Mr. Ashbury, the manager of the theatre in Dublin, to solicit an engagement in his company. His love of the drama developed itself in his boyhood; and from the time when he first went to reside in the metropolis, and had an opportunity of witnessing the best performances, his predilection for the stage was gradually strengthened, until, at last, released from the trammels of the university, and free to decide for himself, he resolved upon embarking on the hazardous sea of an actor's life. Mr. Ashbury, it appears, granted his request without hesitation, and Farquhar made his first appearance in the character of Othello. His person is described to have been good, his memory retentive, his delivery just, and his action easy and agreeable. But unfortunately his voice wanted depth and power, and he was so much affected by stage fright, as it is called, which some actors have never been able wholly to overcome, that his success was very moderate, especially in tragic parts, which require self-possession more than any other. Yet the audience, in consideration of the judgment he displayed, treated him with leniency, and he went through several characters, if not with applause, at all events without censure. A circumstance occured, however, towards the close of the season which determined him at once to abandon a profession for which he was so indifferently qualified.

Being on one occasion required to play the part of Guyomar, in Dryden's tragedy of *The Indian Emperor*, he inadvertently wore a real sword, instead of a foil, in the scene where Guyomar kills Vasquez, and converted the mock fight into a scene of actual bloodshed, wound-

ing his brother performer so seriously, that, although he afterwards recovered, his life was for some time despaired of. Farquhar was so alarmed by this accident that he relinquished the boards, and in 1696 accompanied Mr. Wilks, who had entered into an engagement at Drury-lane, to London. What his object was in coming to England does not appear. He was then only eighteen years of age, and had not as yet struck upon any definite course of employment. But Wilks had contracted a strong friendship for him, and discerned in the youth the germs of those talents which were destined to adorn his immature manhood. That he calculated upon rendering Farquhar important services in a sphere where his capabilities might be successfully drawn out, is not improbable; and it was, perhaps, to his zealous offices that the future dramatist was indebted for an introduction to the earl of Orrery, who was so pleased with Farquhar's address, that he bestowed a lieutenancy upon him in his own regiment, which was then serving in Ireland. Whether Farquhar immediately proceeded to join his corps, or lingered in London until he produced his first comedy, for which there is reason to believe the world is indebted to the persevering solicitations of Wilks, is uncertain; but there is no doubt that he served in his military capacity for several years with credit and distinction, and that opportunities were not wanted during the troubles in Ireland, for enabling him to give abundant proofs both of his humanity and his courage.

The comedy of *Love and a Bottle*, written before Farquhar was twenty years of age, was produced at Drury-lane theatre in 1698. Wilks, by some strange accident, had no part assigned to him in this first work of his young friend, although he then stood very high in public favour, in consequence of his success in Dublin, and was evidently ascending with rapidity to that height as a comedian which he shortly afterwards attained, and to which he ultimately added the honour of

contesting the first characters in tragedy with Booth.* *Love and a Bottle* was received with considerable applause. The sprightliness of the dialogue and the entertaining variety of the incidents insured its success with audiences that were now accustomed to the most sparkling wit and intricate intrigues. In Rakewell, a finished specimen of a libertine, Farquhar accurately hit off the sort of levity that was most likely to please: but the part is too loose to bear transplantation into a later age. The author, whose experience of the world when he wrote this piece must have been very limited, had plainly fashioned his taste upon the comedies which were then coming into vogue; and to them, rather than to any original observations of his own on men and manners, the treatment of his subject may be traced. One writer suggests that the character of Mockmode seems to be borrowed from the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* of Molière†; but that sort of vulgar ambition was already so familia-

* Wilks was one of the greatest actors of his day. He is said to have formed his style of acting upon that of Mountford, as Booth did his on that of Betterton. (See Cibber, *passim.*) His ancestors were gentry of condition in Worcestershire, and his grandfather, judge Wilks, raised a troop of horse at his own expense for Charles I. The family at last impoverished themselves so much by their sacrifices in the royal cause, that Wilks's father removed to Dublin, and settled at a place in the neighbourhood of that city, called Rathfarnham, where Wilks was born in 1670. Young Wilks was liberally educated, and appointed to a situation under government, which he threw up at an early age, to indulge his passion for theatricals. His first attempt was the colonel, in Dryden's *Spanish Friar*, which he played in private, and received so much applause, that he ventured into public in January 1689, when he appeared in the character of Othello. In two years afterwards he went to London, and played in Drury-lane in inferior parts; returned to Dublin, where he at once assumed the principal characters, and was next offered a flattering engagement in Drury-lane, which he accepted. This was the spring of his fortunes. He was one of the most indefatigable students on the stage, and one of the most respectable men off it. From the similarity of their circumstances, and the close neighbourhood of their early studies, it is very likely that Wilks and Farquhar may have been intimates in their youth, as they were faithful friends to the end.

† *Biographia Dramatica.* This scrap of criticism, as also the whole account of the comedy in Jones's miscellany, is to be found in the same words in a work, entitled *A Theatrical Dictionary*, which was published in 1792. Indeed, nearly the whole of the *Theatrical Dictionary* is embodied in the *Biographia Dramatica*, along with the account of the rise and progress of the stage, a great part of which is abstracted from the introduction to Dodsley's *Old Plays*. We have a copy of the *Theatrical Dictionary* in our possession, which belonged to "Charles Walmesley," who has interpaged it with a multitude of MS. notes and printed extracts on authors, actors, and plays, written in a remarkably fair round hand; and on the inside of the cover some equally curious collector and translator has written in pencil "Jones has used this in his *Biog. Dram.* 1812!"

rised to the stage in native dramas that Farquhar had no need to travel so far for the pattern of a *parvenu.*

This view of the sources from whence Farquhar derived his hints is in a great measure justified by his next comedy, *The Constant Couple,* or *A Trip to the Jubilee,* which he produced in 1700, the year of the jubilee. It appears that a small volume was published the year before, entitled *The Adventures of Covent Garden,* in imitation of Scarron's *City Romance,* a work which is described as having been wholly destitute of merit; yet from this production Farquhar is said to have drawn at least two of the principal characters in *The Constant Couple,* and some of its most striking scenes, turning the dross of the original into gold by the touch of his creative genius. *The Constant Couple* is not one of the most felicitous of Farquhar's plays, but its success was not surpassed by that of any contemporary work. It ran for fifty-three nights. Much of its good fortune was, probably, to be attributed to the admirable acting of Wilks, who, in the character of sir Harry Wildair, not only exceeded the anticipations of the author, but laid the permanent foundation of his own fame. Sir Harry Wildair would not be considered now as a very successful portrait of a fine gentleman; for, notwithstanding the associations of an agreeable kind by which he is surrounded, and the sportive and airy mirth which gives such elasticity to the character, it must be confessed that the merit lies rather in the conception than the execution, which is thin and superficial.

Sir Richard Steele attributes its success wholly to the inimitable acting of Wilks. He says, "the dialogue in itself has something too low to bear a criticism upon it; but Mr. Wilks entered into the part with so much skill, that the gallantry, the youth, and gaiety, of a young man of plentiful fortune, is looked upon with as much indulgence on the stage as in real life, without any of these intermixtures of wit and humour which usually prepossess us in favour of such characters in other plays." It was thought that in sir Harry Wildair, as

in captain Plume and Mirabel, the author intended to convey likenesses of himself, but the resemblance in such cases is either so partial or indefinite that the suspicion, whether it be well or ill-founded, does not conduct us to any satisfactory conclusion. That a man who, like Farquhar, was of a gay, generous, and heedless temper, might have infused something of his own nature into characters that moved in a course of action so similar to that of his own experience is probable enough; but it is equally probable that the process of infusion was an unconscious operation of the mind. The difficulty would have been to avoid drawing from himself in pictures where he mainly relied upon his actual knowledge of life, and not of books or plays; and thus, while he might have believed that he was testing the character by what he had seen and observed, he might in reality have been testing it by what he had felt and thought. But it is immaterial what his design was if in the end we get a more familiar view of nature; and certainly a dramatist who looks in upon himself in the way Farquhar is supposed to have done in these favourite parts, is more likely to accomplish a truthful performance, than one who paints at random, and is satisfied with conventional effects.

The success of *The Constant Couple*, and especially of Wilks in the principal part, tempted Farquhar to follow it up in 1701 with a sequel, entitled *Sir Harry Wildair*. This piece, sustained in some measure by the reputation of the play of which it was a continuation, kept the stage for nine nights; but being, as such second births usually are, much inferior to the original comedy, was soon after consigned to oblivion. It contributed, however, to extend the reputation of a very clever actor, Harry Norris, whose performance of Jubilee Dicky was so humorous that, like the Jerry Sneak Russell of our own times, he was always known afterwards by the name of the part in which he excelled. It is said that his benefit was on one occasion advertised as being for Dicky Norris.

It was somewhere about this time that Farquhar formed an acquaintance with the celebrated Mrs Oldfield, which there is sufficient reason to believe ripened afterwards into a warmer sentiment than mere friendship. Mrs. Oldfield was the daughter of an officer in the army, and was born in 1683. Her father, having early expended his fortune, left "Miss Nancy" wholly unprovided for; upon which she took up her residence with her aunt, who kept the Mitre Tavern in St. James's Market, a house that was much frequented by theatrical people. Farquhar, happening to dine there one day, overheard the young lady reading some passages behind the bar from *The Scornful Lady* of Beaumont and Fletcher; and being much surprised by the versatility and skill with which she diversified the several parts of the dialogue, curiosity led him to form an excuse for entering the little room where the reader was concealed. The personal beauty of Mrs. Oldfield completed the fascination which her voice had already begun, and, Farquhar, charmed by her manner, strongly urged her to try her fortune on the stage, to which her own inclinations had always directed her. The praises of so competent a judge inspired Mrs. Oldfield with such hopes, that she easily prevailed upon her mother to interest captain (afterwards sir John) Vanbrugh in her favour; and that lady having repeated the terms in which Farquhar had spoken of her daughter, Vanbrugh was induced to recommend her to Rich, the manager of Drury-lane, who gave her an engagement of fifteen shillings per week. Her fine form, expressive features, and melodious tones soon won upon the town; and in consequence of some favourable notice which the duke of Bedford took of her, Rich raised her salary to twenty shillings. From that point she gradually ascended until she reached the highest walks both in tragedy and comedy. Upon the death of Mrs. Verbruggen she succeeded to the line of comic parts which that popular actress had formerly held, and in which Mrs. Oldfield

continued without a rival to the end of her career.* To Farquhar, therefore, Mrs. Oldfield was indebted for her first step in her profession, and afterwards for one or two characters in which her abilities were exhibited in the most favourable light. The intimacy, however, that subsisted between them, to whatever lengths it may have been carried, did not mar either of their fortunes; for Mrs. Oldfield, as her fame increased, rapidly extended the circle of her friends, and Farquhar went into Holland, it is conjectured with his regiment, of which excursion he has left some humorous memorials in his letters. In 1702 he published a volume of miscellanies, consisting of poems, essays, and letters,—a bundle of mixed fancies, in which, as was usual with him, the gay and sportive predominated over the serious.

Shortly after this work appeared Farquhar produced *The Inconstant*, or *The Way to Win him*. This play, which is still one of our most popular comedies, is derived from *The Wildgoose Chase* of Fletcher. In the preface Farquhar observes, "I shall only say, that

* Mrs Oldfield's greatest excellence lay in comedy. Her lady Townley was considered her best part: but she also acquired a high reputation in tragedy, although it did not fall in so naturally with her temperament. Thomson gratefully records the "grace and dignity, and happy variety," with which she impersonated his own Sophonisba; and it is said that, in a particular passage, the grandeur of her look and declamation astonished even Wilks who acted with her. In her private life Mrs. Oldfield was not free from those frailties, which have too often degraded some of our most distinguished actresses. Her numerous *liaisons* were matter of notoriety; yet they did not exclude her from the circles of fashionable life, to which the grace and elegance of her style always made her acceptable. She was even received at court, and George II. and queen Caroline, when prince and princess of Wales, frequently noticed her. In conversation she was quick and fluent, if not actually witty. The princess observed to her one day, that it was reported that she and general Churchill were married: "So it is said, your royal highness," replied Mrs. Oldfield, "but we have not owned it yet." Pope, however, who had a nervous horror of players in general, and licentious actresses in particular, ridiculed her conversation, and made her character the subject of a severe satire in one of his epistles, under the portrait of a dying coquet. In another place he says of her,—

> "Engaging Oldfield! who, with grace and ease,
> Could join the arts to ruin and to please."

Yet Mrs. Oldfield, notwithstanding these errors, was a woman of a generous and humane nature. She befriended Savage the poet, when almost every body else deserted him; frequently relieved his distresses with a liberal hand; and, when he was sentenced to death upon a charge of murder, aggravated by suborned testimony, she interceded so successfully with Walpole on his behalf as to obtain his pardon.

I took the hint from Fletcher's *Wildgoose Chase;*" and Rowe, in the epilogue, repeats this slight and indefinite acknowledgment: —

> "From Fletcher's great original, to day
> We took the hint of this our modern play:
> Our author, from his lines, has strove to paint
> A witty wild, inconstant, free gallant," &c.

Now, to use the mildest term that can be applied in such a case, this form of admission of a dramatic obligation is at least disingenuous. Instead of taking the "hint" of *The Inconstant* from *The Wildgoose Chase,* Farquhar took nearly the whole play from that "great original," in some places copying the scenes almost *verbatim,* and rarely effecting a greater alteration than the melting of the blank verse into conversational prose, and the enlivening of the dialogue with modern and flippant interpolations. Many scenes of Fletcher's play are wholly left out, and a new turn is given to the catastrophe, the merit of which entirely belongs to Farquhar; but the obligation is so considerable, that Farquhar, who, on most other occasions was not chargeable with want of candour, was unquestionably censurable for not stating it more fully. The entire design of *The Wildgoose Chase* is fairly transplanted into the *Inconstant;* and the principal difference between them consists in the greater freedom and pliancy of the language, — the one being a bold and somewhat cumbrous play of the old school, and the other a lively, sparkling comedy. The transformation, however, is effected less by the invention than the tact of Farquhar, who, loosening the spirit of the play from the formal incumbrances of old Fletcher's lines, presents it to us in all its aërial beauty and elastic wit. Farquhar ought to have been content with this amount of praise, without looking for more to which he was not entitled. The last act, the celebrated scene in the house of the courtezan, belongs altogether to Farquhar; but is not founded, as some authorities

assert *, upon an adventure that occurred to the author, but upon a circumstance that happened to the chevalier de Chastillon in Paris, a fact to which reference is made by the author in the preface. This very sprightly comedy is one of the best of Farquhar's productions, although, critically considered, it is not free from some blemishes in the conduct. It may be reasonably doubted whether the interest excited by Mirabel in the last act, is not of too serious a nature for the legitimate province of comedy; and whether the ideal of the dissolute rake is not, in some measure, spoiled by placing him in such a dilemma, amidst a group of people worse than himself, so that the spectator is forced to sympathise in a distress brought upon him by his own indiscretions, and of which it would be no more than justice that he should pay the penalty. But the sudden contrast which this scene affords to the rest of the play, and the intensity of the excitement it produces, have always rendered it effective and popular in representation. In the disguise of Oriana, and the outrage of her sex's timidity which she commits in following her lover into such haunts of depravity, we have a striking instance of that tendency to the inconsistent and improbable, which Farquhar sometimes discovers in his comedies, and which he was not unwilling to cultivate, where it could be rendered subservient to the production of brilliant points and startling situations. But the vivacity he poured into his dialogue compensated for whatever was questionable in the plot; and reconciled the audience to its occasional incongruities by the overwhelming force of good humour. *The Inconstant* was not so successful at first as it deserved to be, in consequence of a variety of foreign novelties which are said to have infatuated the public at the time; but the indifference with which it was treated in the first instance has been amply atoned for by the applause with which it has been received upon the stage ever since.

Farquhar had now produced four comedies, and had

* *Biog. Dram.* for instance.

scarcely attained his four-and-twentieth year, was a general favourite in society, and had already acquired a reputation for gallantry, which threw him into a more prominent position than his means could enable him to support him with credit. These circumstances contributed, no doubt, in a great measure to expose him, without reflection, to the first chance that offered for improving his fortunes. And a temptation now presented itself, which he was one of the last men in the world to approach with caution, or even to resist in obedience to any prudential considerations. A lady, captivated either by Farquhar's manners or his genius, or both, fell violently in love with him; and as, from time immemorial, ladies, who take such wayward fancies into their heads, are not particularly scrupulous in the means they employ for gratifying their ends, so this lady, suspecting that a gentleman of such a volatile disposition would not be very likely to surrender his liberty, unless some stronger argument than the persuasions of youth and beauty, with which Farquhar it may be presumed was sufficiently familiar, were to be held out to him, caused it to be reported that she was possessed of a handsome fortune. Having once established her reputation for wealth, she took care that Farquhar should be made acquainted with how much she was devoted to him; and it was therefore not very surprising that these united charms, which alike flattered his hopes and his vanity, should have prevailed over his love of freedom, his discretion, and his sensibility. To this lady Farquhar was married in 1703, nor did he discover, until after his marriage, for he was too proud and generous to inquire into her circumstances before, that his wife had nothing to bestow upon him but her affections. This was a severe trial of his patience and temper: without any resources but the pittance he derived from his commission, and with the prospect of an increasing family, the gloomy future cast a dark cloud over his spirits; but he was formed of such fine and noble qualities that, although this terrible

disappointment preyed upon his heart, and in the sequel shortened his life, he never reproached his wife for an imposition which he attributed to the ardour of her attachment. He treated her with unceasing delicacy and kindness until his death dissolved their union.

According to most of the authorities in which the scanty incidents of Farquhar's life are preserved, he brought out his comedy of *The Twin Rivals* shortly after his marriage; but the dedication of the play in the first edition bears the date of 23d December, 1702, which determines the fact, that it was before the public previously. In this play Farquhar aimed at the construction of a more regular piece than he had hitherto attempted; one that should more strictly develope the principles of poetical justice: but in order to accomplish this end, he appears to have drawn into the plot some vices, which are too grave to be punished by comedy. This objection was made against it by the critics of the day, and as the question thus raised is of no slight importance in reference to the canons that regulate dramatic composition, we will give Farquhar's defence of his deviation from the accepted notions. "It is said, I must own," he observes in his preface, "that the business of comedy is chiefly to ridicule folly, and that the punishment of vice falls rather into the province of tragedy; but if there be a middle sort of wickedness, too high for the *sock* and too low for the *buskin*, is there any reason that it should go unpunished? what are more obnoxious to humane society than the villains exposed in this play; the frauds, plots, and contrivances upon the fortunes of men and the virtue of women? but the persons are too mean for heroic; then what must we do with them? why, they must of necessity drop into comedy; for it is unreasonable to imagine that the lawgivers in poetry would tie themselves up from executing that justice which is the foundation of their constitution; or to say, that exposing vice is the business of the drama, and yet make rules to screen it from

persecution." This argument proceeds on the supposition that there are crimes that the law touches not; and that since they are below the province of tragedy, they must necessarily belong to the province of comedy. But this reasoning is evidently erroneous, because it would inevitably include, as being proper to comedy, every species of human character and social offence that did not legitimately come within the range of the heroic. Now, for the middle sort of wickedness of which Farquhar speaks, it is obvious that there ought to be a middle sort of drama; but that idea did not originate with Farquhar, nor does he seem indeed to have entertained it at all, but rather to have conceived that there were but the two forms, tragedy and comedy, into which all the shades and modifications of vice and virtue were to be drawn. While it must be acknowledged that these two forms are the spring-heads from which all the streams of dramatic literature descend, and that each stream must have the predominant taste that it carries from its source, yet, we think that plays which profess expressly to imitate the experiences of real life must be permitted, like the winding waters of the stream, to take that course which is natural to the events through which they flow. Thus adapting themselves by an obvious principle to the immediate subject, they never exhibit any awkward distortions for the sake of an artificial unity; nor, on the other hand, is their onward current distracted into devious channels which spoil both unity and nature. Several plays of Shakspeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Shirley cannot be strictly designated either as tragedies or comedies: they are plays of passions and incidents common to mankind, and taking exactly such shapes in their progress as their materials suggested. The error Farquhar committed in *The Twin Rivals* was in grafting upon a comedy the stronger shoots of this intermediate description of drama, by which he, in some degree, hurt the pleasure of his livelier scenes, and effectually forced the audience, towards the con-

clusion, into a more grave feeling than was consistent with the main object of the piece. Perhaps the audience discovered this defect, as the play was not very fortunate on the stage in the first season, and was ultimately set aside altogether. We learn also that the principal delinquent was supposed to have been intended as a portrait of some well-known individual; but Farquhar repelled the imputation, wittily observing, that "characters in plays are like Long-lane clothes, not hung out for the use of any particular people, but to be bought by only those they appear to fit."

A farce, called *The Stage Coach*, in which Farquhar was assisted by Mr. Motteux*, was acted in 1705; but it was no more than an adaptation, improved in the translation, of a French trifle, entitled *Les Carosses d'Orleans*. It is probable that the help which Farquhar received from Motteux on this occasion was confined to the mere interpretation of the original, and that the whole merit, which is very little, of the farce may be attributed to Farquhar.

His last comedy, *The Recruiting Officer*, was brought out in 1706. It is a felicitous picture of his own experiences in the town of Shrewsbury, where he was employed in the recruiting service; and, as a mark of gratitude for the hospitality he received in that neighbourhood, he appropriately dedicated it to "all friends round the wrekin." Several of the characters were confessedly drawn after living individuals, and captain Plume was, with a harmless pleasantry, designed for himself. The humours of serjeant Kite, the sprightliness of the dialogue, and the general truth of the sentiments, will long render this comedy popular

* Peter Anthony Motteux was born in Normandy in 1660, and came over to England at the time of the revocation of the edict of Nantz. He kept a considerable East India warehouse in Leadenhall-street, held a situation in the foreign department of the post-office, to which he was recommended by his acquaintance with modern languages; and was the author of no less than seventeen dramatic pieces, and a translation into English of Don Quixote. He was found dead in a disorderly house in St. Clement's Danes, and was supposed to have been murdered.

upon the stage, especially in the provinces where its allusions are more readily understood and appreciated than in the metropolis. Farquhar was fond of introducing military characters and Irishmen into his plays, the two classes of persons with whom his associations brought him into most frequent intercourse, and it is not to be denied that he took liberties with both that would hardly have been tolerated in any writer who was not himself an officer and an Hibernian. His Irishmen are very unskilfully delineated, and cannot be regarded otherwise than as broad caricatures; for example, Teague in *The Twin Rivals*, who speaks a language that might, with almost equal propriety, be assigned to a Welshman. But his military characters are described with remarkable vivacity and fidelity; and *The Recruiting Officer* may be regarded as the most perfect picture of life in country quarters, and, at the same time, one of the most amusing comedies in the language.

But Farquhar's circumstances now began to assume a very desponding aspect. His family were increasing about him, and he had still nothing certain to depend upon except his trifling income as a lieutenant. Although he availed himself of all the leisure moments he could appropriate from the duties of his profession, he was unable by the exercise of his talents to prevent the accumulation of debts which the pressing necessities of his family rendered unavoidable. Besides, the drama was a precarious and discouraging pursuit, which a man so sensitive upon all points where the feelings and happiness of others were concerned, must have followed in a constant state of nervous anxiety.

This exhausting solicitude painfully affected his health, and at last, when his pecuniary liabilities menaced him from all sides, and there appeared to be no escape through any exertion of his own from the misery to which he was exposed, he applied for assistance to a nobleman who had interest about court, and who often professed the warmest friendship for him. Farquhar's

object was, of course, to obtain some permanent provision; but such were the immediate perils by which he was surrounded, that he would gladly have seized upon any means that offered of relieving himself from present incumbrances. His friend, the courtier, repeated all his former declarations of his strong desire to serve him, expressed the utmost concern at the disagreeable situation in which he was placed, regretted that it was not in his power at the moment to do any thing for him, but strongly advised him to sell his commission to meet the exigencies of the occasion, adding, that in a short time, he might rely upon his interest to procure him another. Grasping at the faint promise of future help, and relying confidently on the honour of his patron, Farquhar sold out, paid his debts, and when want actually pressed upon his wife and children, he renewed his application to the noble lord, anticipating, in the simplicity of his nature, that his lordship would rescue him from the destitution that had resulted from his own advice. But in this hope Farquhar was grievously mistaken. The patronage of the courtier receded as the necessities of the author advanced: his lordship had either forgotten his promise, or had given it as a matter of course, without ever intending to resolve it into performance. This last disappointment overwhelmed Farquhar. His physical strength had for some time been giving way, and his buoyant spirits were already much shattered; but the anguish of this heartless treatment brought on that decline of the powers under which he finally sunk. Yet his gaiety and his genius never deserted him. Upon his death-bed he may be said to have composed his last comedy, the liveliest, and most ingenious of all his works. *The Beaux Stratagem* was commenced and finished within six weeks during his last illness, and Farquhar was so conscious of his situation, that while he was engaged in writing it, he prophesied that he should die before the run of the play was over — a prediction which

was fulfilled to the letter. When the comedy was in rehearsal, Wilks, who was unremitting in his attentions, told him that Mrs. Oldfield thought he ought to provide Mrs. Sullen with a divorce, as the only way to reconcile with honour her marriage to Archer. Farquhar, catching the observation with vivacity, replied, "Oh I will, if she please, salve that immediately, by getting a real divorce, marrying her myself, and giving her my bond that she shall be a real widow in less than a fortnight." Such was the spirit that animated poor Farquhar to the last.

He died in the latter end of April, 1707, before he had quite reached his thirtieth year, and only four years after his imprudent marriage. Amongst his papers Wilks found the following characteristic note addressed to himself:—"Dear Bob, I have not any thing to leave thee to perpetuate my memory but two helpless girls; look upon them sometimes, and think of him that was, to the last moment of his life, thine, George Farquhar." Wilks discharged the sad office enjoined upon him with the fidelity of a sincere friend: and when the girls were old enough to be put out into the world, obtained a benefit for each of them. But their ultimate fortunes were in the last degree deplorable. One of them was married to a low tradesman, and died soon after; and the other was sunk into the depths of penury, a being of mean habits and unrefined tastes. Mrs. Farquhar also died in great indigence.

The private character of George Farquhar offers a very favourable contrast to that of the majority of his contemporaries. Whatever licentiousness may be found in his plays—and, in that respect, they are more free from objection than any other comedies of the period—his life was not chargeable with profligacy or want of principle. He carried himself, throughout all the fluctuating circumstances in which he was placed, as a man of kindly dispositions, of just and generous qualities, and of a most placable and forgiving disposition. If

his wit was not so brilliant as that of Congreve, it was less caustic. It might have been said of him that —

> "His wit in the combat, as gentle as bright,
> Ne'er carried a heart-stain away on its blade."

In conversation his powers were agreeable rather than dazzling; and, no doubt, derived much of their charm from that innate goodness of heart, which mellowed alike his actions and his language.*

The triumphant reception of *The Beaux Stratagem* at the Haymarket soothed the last moments of the author's life. In a brief advertisement prefixed to the play on its publication, he intreated the reader's palliation of its faults, on account of his illness, which prevented him from amending them; and acknowledged the friendly and indefatigable care of Wilks, to which

* Farquhar has given the world a picture of himself (addressed to a lady) which is curious as a snatch of autobiographical painting, and remarkable alike for its candour and its liveliness. "My outside is neither better nor worse than my Creator made it; and the piece being drawn by so great an artist, it were presumptuous to say there were many strokes amiss I have a body qualified to answer all the ends of its creation, and that is sufficient. As to the mind, which in most men wears as many changes as their body, so in me it is generally dressed like my person, in black Melancholy is its every day apparel; and it has hitherto found few holidays to make it change its clothes. In short, my constitution is very splenetic yet very amorous; both which I endeavour to hide, lest the former should offend others, and that the latter might incommode myself: and my reason is so vigilant in restraining these two failings, that I am taken for an easy-natured man with my own sex, and an ill-natured clown by yours. * * * I have very little estate, but what lies within the circumference of my hat †; and should I by mischance come to lose my head, I should not be worth a groat, but I ought to thank Providence that I can by an hour's study live one and twenty with satisfaction to myself, and contribute to the maintenance of more families than some who have thousands a year. I have something in my outward behaviour, which gives strangers a worse opinion of me than I deserve; but I am more than recompensed by the opinion of my acquaintance, which is as much above my desert. I have many acquaintance, very few intimates, but no friend, I mean in the old romantic way; I have no secret so weighty, but what I can bear in my own breast; nor any duels to fight, but what I may engage in without a second; nor can I love after the old romantic discipline. I would have my passion, if not led, yet at least waited on, by my reason; and the greatest proof of my affection that a lady must expect is this — I would run any hazard to make us both happy, but would not for any transitory pleasure make either of us miserable."

† *Sir Oliver.* Well — but what security could you give? You have no land, I suppose?

Charles Surface Not a mole-hill, nor a twig, but what's in the bough-pots out of the window!

SHERIDAN's *School for Scandal.*

he ascribed in chief the success of the comedy. Of all his pieces *The Beaux Stratagem* is the most rich in wit, the most licentious in subject, and, with all its excesses, the closest to life. If Farquhar's comedies are tinged by the libertinism of the age, they are not so deeply coloured with levity as to be unfit for representation in our time. His taste was comparatively pure, and his good-nature was not without its moral influence upon his writings. His rakes are not altogether heartless and abandoned; their errors are more the errors of youth and circumstances, than of principle; they are the dupes of the designing, rather than premeditated intriguers; and they generally retrieve themselves, and make their peace with society, before they are dismissed from the scene. There is not, perhaps, much real character in his plays, but there is always an award of justice that touches the core of some social virtue, and impresses a wholesome practical lesson upon the spectator. He never surrounds vice with such charms as to render it attractive, without showing us in the end how perishable are its fascinations; and there is this prevailing spirit of goodness in his comedies, that they expose vice without resorting to ill-natured ridicule or uncharitable sarcasm. His plots are invariably well conducted; they are sometimes improbable, but always sprightly and entertaining. His dialogue is not so forcible as that of Wycherley, nor so vivid as that of Congreve, but it is more natural and easy. His men of fashion do not talk in antithetical periods, but in a perpetual flow of high spirits; and it is this constant exhilaration and hilarity that must always render his plays popular upon the stage.

COLLEY CIBBER.

(1671—1757.)

There are few persons gifted with the same degree of talent, who have been so unfortunate in the estimate formed of their literary pretensions as the subject of the present memoir. Incurring the bitterest enmity of one of those master-spirits whose works endure with the language in which they are written, while the monstrous injustice of Pope has been universally acknowledged, it has been unfairly urged that Cibber owes a greater portion of his celebrity as an author to the circumstance of his being damned to everlasting fame by the most popular poet of the age, than to his own intrinsic merit. It is more than insinuated, that had Cibber never figured as the hero of the *Dunciad*, he would have come down to posterity with less claims to distinction than that which he has derived from the invidious position in which he has been placed by a merciless satirist.

Cibber's merits as an author are of no mean degree; for independently of the comedy which still keeps possession of the stage, notwithstanding the great advance in refinement since the period of its production, the masterly portraitures which he has given of his theatrical contemporaries must ever establish him as a critic of first-rate pretensions. Valuable and numerous as are the delineations of society and manners of the period in which Cibber flourished, none are more spirited than those which we owe to his pen, both in the *dramatis personæ* of his comedies, and the admirable sketches of living characters with whom he associated; and possessing so many and such high claims to consideration,

it seems peculiarly hard that he should appear to be indebted to the stigma attached to his name for any part of his well-earned celebrity.

Colley Cibber was born on the 5th of November, 1671, in Southampton-street, Covent-garden. His father, Caius Gabriel Cibber, a native of Holstein, after having pursued his studies at Rome, under the patronage of the king of Denmark, came to London to practise his art as a sculptor, some years previous to the restoration of Charles II. The necessity, imposed by a narrow income, of producing cheap and numerous works, which, for the most part, were executed hastily in free-stone, and sold at low prices, prevented the artist from attaining the rank in his profession to which, under happier circumstances, his talents would have raised him. Amid a multitude of figures of various descriptions, the claims of the elder Cibber to distinction as a sculptor, are chiefly supported by two statues, which are pronounced by all who can understand and appreciate the force and beauty of unaffected expression in the delineation of feeling, to be the works of a man of very considerable genius. These painfully characteristic illustrations of raving and melancholy madness were executed as appropriate decorations of Bethlehem Hospital, and have since been removed to the new lunatic asylum in St. George's Fields, where they still remain, the trophies of a strong and original mind, breaking forth from the trammels of art, and drawing its inspiration from truth and nature. The felicity of Pope's witty designation of these statues, as the hero of the *Dunciad's* "brazen brainless brothers," is somewhat lessened by the circumstance of their being carved in stone; but an inaccuracy of this kind was scarcely to be regarded by the satirist, in the eager desire to brand his victim with the double disgrace of audacity and dullness.

On the mother's side, Colley Cibber was descended from an ancient and highly respectable family, which became extinct upon the death of his uncle, William

Colley, after whom he had been named. The Colleys traced their ancestry up to William of Wickham, while their immediate predecessors had served honourably as sheriffs and members of parliament down to the late reign; and though the family estate was said to have been considerably impoverished by the exertions of sir William Colley, the father of Mrs. Cibber, in the royal cause, she is stated to have brought her husband a fortune amounting to 6000*l.* Young Cibber was, in 1681, sent to the free grammar-school of Grantham in Lincolnshire, where he remained until about the year 1689, having made himself master of all the learning which that establishment could supply. From his own account, Cibber was neither a diligent scholar nor ambitious of academic honours. The peculiar liveliness of his talents, while they enabled him to acquire without difficulty such instructions as his tutor at Grantham could afford, rendered steady application and severe study irksome, and, accordingly, when an attempt made to procure his admission upon the foundation of Winchester college failed, he confesses himself more pleased to be released from the restrictions imposed upon a student, than disappointed at the loss of his election.

At this early period of life Cibber began to cherish a passion for the stage, which subsequently became too irresistible to be extinguished; but not daring to make his predilection known to his family, and hopeless of the means of indulging it by his own unassisted efforts, he requested permission to continue his studies at one of the universities. Cambridge was the seat of learning fixed upon; a selection made in consequence of the elder Cibber having formed an acquaintance with several of the heads of houses, while employed in carving statues for the new library of Trinity college. The parents, however, suffered some months to elapse before they took measures to enter their son as a student of the university, and this critical period riveted the inclination already imbibed for the "idle trade" which the young man afterwards followed. The disadvantage of

allowing so mere a boy to trifle away his time in London, at length appears to have been manifest to the father, who, in order to have him under his own eye, desired his son to join him at Chatsworth, where he was employed in executing sundry gods and goddesses, fauns and dryads, which, according to the taste of the times, were considered appropriate ornaments for pleasure grounds. Before the youth could arrive in Derbyshire, the landing of the prince of Orange in the west of England changed his destination. Colley Cibber found his father in arms at Nottingham, whither he had marched under the banner of the earl of Devonshire, in aid of the protestant champion; and the old gentleman, feeling unequal to the hardships of a winter's campaign, offered his son as a substitute, which being accepted, he returned to his more agreeable employment at Chatsworth, while the young aspirant for military fame jumped with transport into the vacant saddle. The revolution being effected without bloodshed, a few marchings and counter marchings, together with a dinner to the princess Anne, comprised the only incidents attendant upon our hero's military career. His name did not appear amid the list of those who obtained commissions for their services, and he could now only hope for preferment through the patronage of the earl of Devonshire, whose interest at court, in consequence of the share he had taken in placing William III. on the throne of England, was supposed to be very great.

The facility with which Colley Cibber abandoned the military profession has been imputed to cowardice, but the same literary and theatrical tastes, the love of the light amusements of the town, and the society of wits and men of pleasure, which had already obtained a strong influence over a youthful mind, might, even in so brief a campaign, have sufficed to create a distaste to a mere soldier's life, which, in those days particularly, offered a striking contrast to the refined and elegant manners of the metropolis. Cibber had experienced none of the dangers and vicissitudes of war; but he

had probably seen quite enough of country quarters to desire a speedy return to the capital. With the promise of being provided for at the earliest opportunity, the youth came to London in attendance upon his patron; but being exposed during a period of several months to the temptations of the theatre, he grew indifferent to every other means of advancing his fortune, and determined, in defiance of the authority of his father, and in opposition to the wishes of his friends, to go upon the stage. The services of this new volunteer appear at first to have been rather endured than accepted, for we hear of him only as a hanger-on behind the scenes, without any salary, or any allotted line of business.

Nature had not gifted Colley Cibber with those striking qualifications which afford assurance of success in the histrionic art; his voice was thin and weak, and his figure, not yet fully developed, wanted dignity and importance. He, however, possessed a good ear, and recited with sense and judgment; but such slender advantages were insufficient to recommend him to those characters which formed the object of his ambition. Like all stage-struck youths, Colley Cibber desired to shine in tragedy; but being well aware that, as he himself expresses it, his pale dismal complexion and meagre figure were against him, he could entertain little hope of ever playing the lover with Mrs. Bracegirdle, an actress celebrated in the softer heroines of the stage.

Undeterred by the obstacles which opposed the fulfilment of his wishes, the persevering candidate continued to haunt the theatre, endeavouring, though for a long time in vain, to attract the attention of the prompter, and too happy to be entrusted with the most trifling commission which that functionary held at his disposal. During several years, we are told, he obtained no designation more respectful than that of "Master Colley," and even after he had surmounted the difficulties attendant upon a debut, figured in the play-bills merely as the representative of a servant. One of these early appearances, though attended with unpromising circum-

stances, was fortunate in its results, since it gave him a permanent place amongst the company, and secured to him a salary which, though trifling, must have been very acceptable. Upon the authority of Davies we learn, that after waiting a considerable time, he obtained the honour of carrying a message to Betterton, who enacted the hero of the night. Losing all courage and self-possession when before this awful presence, Colley's ill-timed agitation marred the whole scene. Betterton, exasperated by the derangement which ensued, inquired, "in some anger, who the young fellow was that had committed the blunder." Downs, the prompter, replied, "Master Colley." "Master Colley! then forfeit him." "Why, sir," says the prompter, "he has no salary." "No!" replied the old man; "then put him down ten shillings, and forfeit him five."

After this period the actor crept on, but still very slowly, until his salary was doubled; his earliest prospect of success being opened by his performance of the Chaplain, in Otway's tragedy, *The Orphan* a character which, though only appearing in one scene, is of some importance, and calculated to show the merits of a judicious speaker to advantage. Cibber, in lively terms describes the joy he felt when the music of applause, the first that had yet greeted his performance, gladdened his delighted ears. Goodman, a celebrated actor of his day, confirmed the public approbation, by an opinion of the most encouraging description. Although retired from the stage, he was in the habit of attending rehearsals; and the morning after the performance of *The Orphan* when, at his own request, the young man who had acquitted himself so well in the character of the Chaplain was pointed out to him, he surveyed him carefully for a moment, and then clapping him on the back, expressed with an oath his conviction that he would turn out a good actor. Cibber, to whom praise was equally novel and gratifying, was affected even to tears, by a commendation so unexpected, and which came with great weight from a person of Goodman's

theatrical experience. Filled with transport by a prediction which promised to realise the fondest dreams of his imagination, he tells us that he could only compare the elation of his mind to the feelings of Alexander of Macedon, or Charles of Sweden, when leading on their armies flushed with recent conquest. Some time elapsed before a second opportunity occurred for the attainment of the suffrages of the town. The illness of Mr. Kynaston, to whom, as the original representative, the character of lord Touchwood, in Congreve's *Double Dealer* belonged, prevented his appearance when the play was acted, by the command of queen Mary. Upon this occasion the author paid Cibber the compliment of naming him as the fittest substitute. The part was eagerly undertaken at a short notice, and the young actor acquitted himself so well, that Congreve not only paid him many compliments on the merits of the performance, but employed his influence in procuring an increase of salary, which was raised from fifteen to twenty shillings a week. An allowance of twenty pounds per annum, secured to him by his father, completed the sum total of Cibber's worldly riches; but upon this slender income, and his flattering hopes of the future, he ventured to contract a marriage with a lady whose father, justly displeased by the imprudent nature of her choice, left her for some time to struggle against the difficulties of her situation.

Although it may be impossible for the most zealous partisan to vindicate Cibber wholly from the imputations which, if founded upon truth, would brand his name with profligacy almost exceeding that of the age in which he lived, a candid and impartial biographer will find many well authenticated circumstances to weaken the charges brought against him. This early marriage, and the selection made, of a lady who was a gentlewoman by birth and education, and of unblemished character, shows at least, that although Cibber might have suffered himself to be led away by the temptations of the town, and the example of libertine companions, he possessed

virtuous impulses, which upon the present and other occasions exercised a happy influence over his conduct. An intimacy with a Mr. Shore, a man of respectable family, who held during several years the office of sergeant trumpet of England, led to an acquaintance with his sister, who first attracted the youthful actor's attention by her musical accomplishments. Happening one day to hear the sound of an instrument in an adjoining apartment, and being struck with the sweetness of the voice, and the taste and skill of the accompaniment, he solicited an introduction to the fair performer, and admiration awakening a more tender sentiment, he was speedily deeply in love. Colley Cibber is described as having possessed those lively and engaging manners, which are so well calculated to please the sex; an easy deportment, conversation fraught with gaiety and wit, added to a taste for polite literature, produced an impression on the lady, which led to a mutual attachment, and the young couple speedily agreed to share the blessings or the evils of life together.

Cibber was not quite two-and-twenty at the period of his marriage, which occurred about the year 1693; and intoxicated with the prospect of happiness which a union with the object of his affections afforded, troubled himself little about pecuniary calculations, although the whole of his yearly income did not amount to much more than sixty pounds. Meanwhile he made very slender progress in his profession: either all the best characters were in the hands of established actors, or the degree of success which he had obtained in those entrusted to him did not appear to the managers to warrant any strong expectations of future celebrity; or in consequence of the operation of both these causes, Cibber's pretensions remained disregarded. The low estimate formed of his talents by the people about him, an estimate certainly not justified by his future career, was proved by a very mortifying circumstance, which occurred at the secession of Betterton and several of the principal performers, who on the opening of Drury-lane theatre, in 1695,

went over to the rival house in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The value of Cibber's services being enhanced by the difficulty of procuring actors of established reputation, he was retained by the offer of thirty shillings a week; and in the hope of pushing his fortune in the profession he had chosen, he wrote a prologue for the opening night, fully expecting that, in the event of its acceptance, he should have the honour of speaking it in person. So desirous was Cibber to secure this favourable opportunity for the display of his oratorical powers before the public, that he offered his verses gratis, provided he should be allowed to deliver them himself; but although the address was approved, it was not deemed advisable to hazard its reception by placing it in the hands of the disappointed author, who, compelled by the impoverished state of his exchequer to pocket the affront, relinquished the coveted honour, on the payment of two guineas. The applause with which the prologue was received, though somewhat embittered at the time by its being divided between the speaker and the author, produced very beneficial results. In the first instance it inspired his fellow comedians with a more respectful opinion of his talents than they had hitherto entertained, and in all probability encouraged Cibber to make another and bolder attempt at authorship.

The expenses attendant upon an increasing family, and the difficulty of obtaining a line of character calculated to bring his peculiar qualifications into notice, determined Cibber to write a comedy which should comprise a part adapted to show them to advantage. Repeated disappointment had assured him that he could entertain little hope of being brought prominently forward by the manager, who seemed impressed with a conviction of his inability to support the leading characters with credit to himself or the theatre. This notion seems the more extraordinary, since, upon all occasions in which the exigence of the case called for his services, he never failed to please the audience. Still these successes procured him no permanent advantage;

so difficult is it for an actor to remove the first impression made against him. It was supposed that the arena in which he was calculated to shine was of a very limited nature; and Cibber honestly confesses that this prejudice in all probability kept him out of characters which he was always ready to undertake, but which might not have added to his reputation.

At the period in which Cibber proposed to write a comedy, the morals of the drama were at their lowest ebb. While Wycherley and Congreve had enlivened the stage by their wit, and peopled it with men and women drawn from nature, they were at no pains to instruct or improve the age by the representation of virtuous characters, or by the inculcation of moral lessons of any kind. Their ladies, if not already frail, afford no hope that they would not become so on the first temptation; their fascinations are wholly confined to their wit and beauty, for they exhibit none of the amiable qualities which should adorn the sex; and when not the deceivers or the victims of their lovers, are their tyrants and tormentors. Before the almost universal licentiousness of the acted drama had called forth Collier's just indignation, our young author had seen that the morals of the stage needed reform; and showing, that although perchance his manners might have been tinged by the prevailing profligacy, his mind at least was uncorrupt, he not only determined upon confining the principal female personages of his drama to the chaste portion of the sex, but represented the heroine as a noble example of virtue, a fond and faithful wife, engaged in a pious endeavour to win her husband from the paths of vice. Some of the scenes of *Love's Last Shift* would not be considered particularly decorous by the reader of the present day, but at the time in which they were represented they were models of purity.

The experiment was successful; the audience seemed deeply touched by the portraiture of domestic misery produced by the vice and folly of a reckless libertine, and showed their sympathy in the distress of Amanda

by mingling tears with their plaudits, when the reclaimed husband sees the enormity of his conduct, and turns with repentant fondness to his injured wife.

The play drew crowded houses, and, after a long run at the period of its first representation, kept the stage during many subsequent years. From its success Cibber derived a double triumph; his finished portraiture of the fop of the times eliciting applause in his character of actor, while in that of the author he was hailed as a dramatist of the highest promise. The name of Mrs. Cibber appears in some of the play-bills of the day, as the Hillaria of this comedy. The omission of all record of her merits as an actress, and her presumed withdrawal from the stage when her husband's pecuniary means were increased, afford a fair inference that she was better calculated to shine in private than in public life; while, as she appears to have wholly escaped the malice which was ever busy with Cibber's fame, we may be justified in placing a very favourable construction upon the silence observed towards her.

We are told, that while reaping large profits from the representation of the new comedy, and the attraction which the author's masterly delineation of the fop created, the patentees neither increased his salary, nor brought him forward in other characters of equal importance. Fortunately Cibber's merits were acknowledged and appreciated by more liberal patrons. Sir John Vanburgh paid him, what would now be considered a very doubtful compliment, by taking up the subject of the successful play, and writing a continuation of it, under the title of *The Relapse.* This sort of literary piracy, however, proved very advantageous at the time to the younger dramatist; since sir John insisted that he should personate the coxcomb of the piece, a close, but not servile, copy of *Sir Novelty Fashion,* which, strange to say, has never been stigmatised as a plagiary. Were not our limits too brief, we might be tempted to enter into a curious comparison between these two plays. and show how the coarser mind of sir

John Vanburgh vitiated the original characters. Loveless, whom the audience delighted to regard as a true penitent, is exhibited as having fallen into new excesses; the virtuous Amanda absolutely in danger; and the younger Worthy, the upright and honest friend, metamorphosed into another Loveless, and seeking to corrupt the injured wife, whose conjugal affection, and unwearied efforts in the cause of honour, he had once so nobly respected and sustained.

From this period Cibber seems to have enjoyed a very fair portion of fortune's favours; he arose in the estimation of the public as an actor, and possessed sufficient influence with the managers to induce them to represent several productions of very slender merit. As a dramatic writer, our author's claims to excellence rest upon very few of the numerous plays which he either composed himself, or adapted for the stage from the works of others. His second attempt, under the title of *Woman's Wit*, did not prove successful; and his tragedy of *Xerxes* was most unequivocally damned; the popular periodical of the day amusing the town with an allusion to its fate, by inserting in the inventory of theatrical properties "the imperial robes of Xerxes, never worn but once." Cibber's perseverance, and a consciousness of talent, which, though not available upon all occasions, frequently shone out with brilliant lustre, induced him to persevere; and he was more fortunate in a compilation of two of Fletcher's plays. which was acted with great applause, under the title of *Love makes a Man*. As an original writer, he redeemed himself very nobly in the *Careless Husband*, which is certainly his most finished production; and which he adduces with a degree of modest pride, not unbecoming the author of a work of such acknowledged merit, as a proof that he should have been secured from the unjust satire levelled at him in the *Dunciad;* since it could not apply to the writer of comedies as original, though not, perhaps, so valuable, as any work produced by Pope himself.

The *Lady's Last Stake; or The Wife's Resentment*, is not so happy a production, and has been long laid aside; but a subsequent work, borrowed from a fertile source, the comedy of *Spanish Intrigue*, is still occasionally revived, *She would and she would not; or The Kind Impostor*, was reproduced a few years ago in the shape of an opera. In 1711, Cibber obtained a share in the patent granted to the managers of Druly-lane theatre; entering upon office with an established reputation, both as an author and an actor; for though his range of characters appears not to have been very extensive, there can be no doubt that few or none excelled him in his own particular line. In tragedy, he might have been merely respectable; but previous to the important change introduced by Garrick, his manner of representing certain personages of the drama seems to have been perfect.

Cibber, during the whole of his life, enjoyed the society of the wits and men of fashion about town; and previous to the unfortunate incident which produced the everlasting enmity of Pope, appears to have been upon friendly terms with the poet himself. This celebrated dispute originated in a sarcasm which, though perhaps flung out in the gaiety of the moment, without knowing whom it might hit, was treated as a premeditated insult. Pope, not content with his reputation as a poet, made an attempt to shine as a dramatic writer, and, in conjunction with Arbuthnot and Gay, produced an afterpiece entitled *Three Hours after Marriage*. Notwithstanding the excess of talent employed upon this occasion, the unlucky bantling of such distinguished parents met with an untimely and ignominious end. *Three Hours after Marriage*, represented in the early part of the reign of George I., was driven from the stage by acclamation, the two principal performers, Cibber, and Mrs. Oldfield, suffering severely from the displeasure manifested by the audience, which, in the fury of its indignation, did not discriminate between the author and the actor; but made

both answerable for the demerit of the scene. Shortly after this catastrophe, the prince of Wales having commanded *The Rehearsal* which had been thrown aside for some years, Cibber, who represented Bayes, seized the opportunity afforded by the character, to take a sly revenge for his late discomfiture. Bayes, like the principal personages of the old Italian pantomime, and the Mr. Merrimans of modern times, was in the habit of dealing in personalities, and of making sportive allusions to the topics of the day. The disapprobation of the audience upon the representation of *Three Hours after Marriage* had been principally provoked by a clumsily managed contrivance, by which two lovers had been introduced into the house of a virtuoso in the disguise of a crocodile and a mummy. Cibber could not allow so fair a subject for the exercise of his wit to escape him. His jest upon this notable expedient drew a burst of laughter and applause; and Pope, who was in the house at the time, exasperated beyond all bounds, betrayed himself by an intemperate attack upon the offending party, the moment after the conclusion of the piece. This account of the original provocation, which has never been contradicted, is given by Cibber, and there is very good reason to believe it to be a correct version of the story. Vindicating his right to amuse the town by a satirical stroke at the passing follies of the day, the representative of Bayes declared that he would repeat the jest as long as the public approved of it. Gay, it is said, was equally enraged by this impertinent sally, his resentment being displayed by even stronger marks of displeasure. The tale, however, of his having visited the offence with blows, rests only upon a sneer of lord Chesterfield, who is not always the best authority for imputations of the kind, being little scrupulous concerning the method taken of showing his contempt of those whom he disliked.

The difficulty of contriving original plots, and of

striking out new characters, obliged Cibber to repeat himself in his best works; and when strongly pressed for pecuniary supplies, to reconstruct, translate, and alter the works of others. Pope, the most ungenerous of adversaries, while passing over in silence those admirable comedies whose excellence he could not dispute, pounces at once upon a production of this nature, which he stigmatises as "a patched, vamped future, old revived, new piece." Amongst other less heinous sins of the same description, Cibber has incurred a heavy weight of censure on account of his presumption in daring to lay an irreverend hand on Shakspeare. In palliation of this offence it may be said, that, although he has omitted some very striking beauties in the original drama, he succeeded in rendering *Richard* III. very effective upon the stage; while, at a period in which the great dramatist was very ill appreciated by an audience delighting in the fustian and bombast introduced by Dryden and his followers, there was some merit in discerning the superiority of the bard of Avon, and in endeavouring to rescue one of his neglected works from oblivion.

At the return of the players, and the opening of the theatres, after the restoration of Charles II., comparatively few of Shakspeare's plays were revived; and so vitiated had the public taste become during the popularity of the French school, that even Evelyn, from whose elegant mind and superior judgment something better might have been expected, declares that the age had grown too refined to relish the dramas of the immortal William. The public, though apt to go astray in search of novelty, always returns from the worship of false gods, and vindicates the true religion. Cibber, in a second attempt to bring out one of Shakspeare's tragedies, with alterations and emendations of his own, was so strongly assailed for his presumption, that he deemed it expedient to withdraw the MS. for a time. Subsequently, however, he contrived to get his favourite

version of *King John* acted, by means of a manœuvre rendered necessary by the strong opposition which various circumstances combined to provoke. We are told, upon the authority of Whincop, that it was re-hearsed privately, and brought out on a sudden, before there could be time to form a party against it; and consequently was received with applause. Cibber appeared in the character of Pandulph the pope's legate, in this tragedy, which was not represented until 1744, three years after he had so far retired from the stage as only to appear occasionally, when particularly tempted. Meanwhile, during the nine or ten years which elapsed between the first endeavour to bring out *King John*, under the title of *Papal Tyranny*, the public taste had undergone a complete revolution. The beauties of Shakspeare were discussed, and pointed out by the daily prints, and the attention of the town directed so strongly to the peculiar merits of *King John*, that Rich, encouraged by the commendations of a press rendered influential by the talents of its conductors, ventured to revive the play in its original form. Soon afterwards, a host of men of letters were engaged in editing and adding notes to Shakspeare's dramatic works, and poor Cibber, who assuredly saw and understood his excellences long before they were thus made manifest, has been mercilessly attacked for sins of omission and commission which were necessary to obtain the public sanction at the time. With a few not very important alterations, Cibber's *Richard* III. still keeps possession of the stage; and so strongly has it secured the favour of the town, that it would, perhaps, be a hazardous experiment to attempt to bring it before the public as it was originally written. In fact, the reputation of our author would have stood higher, had he been always equally fortunate in his selections; but the easy carelessness of his disposition rendered him somewhat too indifferent to the consequences of productions brought out on the spur of the moment, when his own

extravagance, or the increase of his family, required that his purse should be replenished.

Cibber seems to have persisted in writing tragedy, and in composing bad verses, in despite of public opinion, and his secret consciousness of the unworthiness, at least, of his rhymes; since he could echo the laugh against himself, and even libel his own productions; his successes and his failures were equally signal, and equally merited; but the nice judgment which he exercised in some instances, might have preserved him from disgraces, which afforded not unjust grounds for the attacks of a host of enemies.

In addition to the offences which the manager of a theatre can scarcely avoid affording to the numerous aspirants which he must necessarily disappoint, the political principles which Cibber maintained unflinchingly to the last, armed many persons against him. Party spirit has seldom run higher than at a period in which the principles that supported the revolution were violently opposed by the adherents of the exiled family. The representation of *The Nonjuror*, a comedy, altered from the *Tartuffe* of Molière, and its success, though few dared to murmur openly at the time, on account of its support of the government, proved very distasteful to the opposite faction; and, in consequence, its author was marked out for future vengeance. Cibber was either openly or covertly attacked by all the writers on the other side of the question, and became the constant butt for the sarcasms and witticisms of men who gladly seized every pretext to lower and degrade a political enemy. It does not come within the scope of this memoir to enter into the state of the parties, or the state of the literature of the times; but it is necessary to allude to both in the biography of a writer who took advantage of his position, as the manager of a theatre, to employ the stage in support of the cause which he had espoused. *The Nonjuror* is now familiar to an English audience, under the title of *The Hypocrite*.

Several of the characters are still preserved in the version which Cibber has given of them, and the lady Woodvil, and Maria, altered into young lady Lambert, and Charlotte, show the peculiar taste and delicacy which guided the adaptor's pencil when he painted women. After the lapse of ten years, but still before the irritation which this unpalatable production occasioned had subsided, *The Provoked Husband*, completed from an unfinished MS. of sir John Vanburgh, was represented; and though its extraordinary merits carried it through against all opposition, every scene which was supposed to emanate from Cibber's pen was assailed with loud disapprobation. Without wishing, in the smallest degree, to detract from the merits of sir John Vanburgh, no one who has been at the trouble of perusing the portion of the comedy which fell into Cibber's hands after the author's death, and of comparing it with the finished play, can fail to be struck with the improvement it sustained in its completion for the stage. Cibber's good nature and good taste interposed to render the conclusion more agreeable to the feelings of the audience, than it would have been had sir John Vanburgh's intentions been carried into effect. By preserving the reputation of the heroine intact, which was scarcely compatible with the original design, he rendered the termination much more satisfactory. Cibber assures us himself, that he had much ado to achieve this point, so strongly bent was Vanburgh upon a tragic catastrophe; the culpability of the poor lady's conduct appearing to him to demand that she should be turned out of doors; but the more refined colleague, making a distinction between dissipation and profligacy, rendered a reconciliation not only practicable, but gratifying to an audience; who would always prefer reform to punishment.

To a very benevolent mind, there is something painful even in the merited distress of characters of pure fiction; and, perhaps, it is not too much to say, that the

disposition of an author may be judged by the manner in which he treats the ideal personages of his creation: a tendency to render them happy at last; to reclaim the evil, and reward the just; form indications of philanthropic feeling which are rarely deceptive. This sort of good nature Cibber undoubtedly possessed; and though, if we should form an estimate of him from the report of his enemies, he would appear before us in a very repulsive character; there is abundant evidence to prove that he has been maligned by those who envied him on account of his successes, or hated him for his political principles. Armstrong, an impartial observer, has given very high testimony in his favour, telling us, that "besides his abilities as a writer, and the singular variety of his powers as an actor, he was, to the last, one of the most cheerful, agreeable, and best-humoured men you would ever wish to converse with."* Although, with respect to the versatility of Cibber's histrionic powers, Armstrong's opinion seems to be at variance with that of the public in general; who were no great admirers of his tragedy, there cannot be any doubt of the accuracy of the portrait, which he has given of the pleasing effect produced by his manners in society: and this unprejudiced report of the impression made by his conduct in social life, forms a strong refutation of the calumnies of his detractors, who have asserted that Cibber indulged in offensive topics; which rendered men of piety and high moral character unwilling to converse with him.

Dennis has not hesitated to accuse the object of his hatred of the most open and insulting display of his infidelity; but though one passage in Cibber's writings has been ungenerously tortured to support the charge of his profane scoffing at sacred things, the general ten-

* Another contemporaneous authority Jacob, in speaking of Cibber says, "He has naturally a good share of wit, an uncommon vivacity, and a great deal of humour, and they are very much improved by the conversation he enjoys which is *the best*."

dency of his works affords no evidence of the fact. Not only scrupulously avoiding the unbecoming levity which so often disgraces the comedies of the times, in his own dramas, there is reason to believe that his persuasions induced sir John Vanburgh to alter a scene in the *Provoked Wife,* which was calculated to bring the clergy into contempt. We learn from Davies, that sir John Brute's substitution of the disguise of a fine lady for that of a member of the order, which this witty, but certainly profane, author delighted to ridicule (having previously made it odious in the person of parson Bull), was supposed to have been adopted at the suggestion of Cibber. Cibber himself states, that sir John Vanburgh was prevailed upon to produce a new scene, and to make his drunken rake, instead of assuming a clerical habit for the purpose, utter his libertine opinions in the robes of a woman of quality; a character which, "not being so indeliby sacred as that of a churchman, whatever follies he exposed in the petticoat, kept him at least clear of his former profaneness, and were now innocently ridiculous to the spectator." A man who, from long and constant habit, has accustomed himself to sport with religious subjects, seldom sees any thing objectionable in the contempt expressed by others; and is, generally speaking, rejoiced to find supporters in any outrage of the kind. Cibber does not openly avow himself to be the person who succeeded in procuring this judicious alteration; but there is sufficient reason to believe that it emanated from the decorous feeling manifested upon so many other occasions. The parties were in habits of close intimacy, and accustomed to consult together when writing for the stage, each entertaining a very high opinion of the productions of the other.

Cibber's life, though busy and bustling, presents very few incidents, excepting those connected with his theatrical management, and the quarrels forced upon him by his numerous assailants; who, even before he had been

elevated to the laureateship, vacant by the death of Mr. Eusden, in 1730, were as active as they were numerous. Of these quarrels, the most important, as well as the most unfortunate, was that in which he was involved with Pope. The origin has been already mentioned, and is almost universally admitted to have been the true cause of the poet's earliest attacks. The history of Pope's life shows that he never forgave an affront, whether real or imaginary; but, probably, had Cibber preserved an inflexible silence after his adversary had expended the first torrent of his indignation, he might have been spared the subsequent assaults. Either from indifference to satirical comment, or an unwillingness to provoke further hostility, Cibber suffered a very considerable period to elapse without noticing the treatment which he had received in the early portion of the *Dunciad*, and in the epistle of Pope to Dr. Arbuthnot; but in the year 1740, when publishing the celebrated *Apology* for his own life, he introduced some remarks which kindled the flame of discord anew. Speaking of Pope, he observes, "When I find my name in the satirical works of this poet, I never look upon it as any malice meant to me, but *profit* to himself; for he considers that *my face* is more known than most in the nation; and, therefore, *a lick at the laureate* will be a sure bait, *ad captandum vulgus*, to catch little readers."

Pope was not slow to resent this slight endeavour, trifling as it must be deemed, to neutralise the effect of his previous aspersions; and, in bringing out a fourth book of the *Dunciad*, held the unfortunate laureate up to universal scorn, as the cherished son of the goddess of dulness. Cibber, who gives us to understand that he had been instigated by his friends in the notice he had taken of the previous attack, found it impossible to remain quiescent under so severe and so unmerited an imputation. He addressed a letter to Pope, which is more distinguished for its betrayal of wounded feelings than for its good taste. Cibber, desirous to retaliate

upon his adversary, and to inflict the same kind of castigation from which he himself was smarting, thought only of present revenge. In an endeavour to render Pope ridiculous in the eyes of the world, he lost sight of the manly tone and honest indignation which would have best become the subject; and though there are several passages in this production which are both sensible and just, the general tendency must be regretted. Great allowances, however, ought to be made for the provocation; and Cibber was doubtless wise enough to perceive that, while the satire of his adversary would command the attention of posterity, his own rejoinders could only hope for an ephemeral existence; and, therefore, felt anxious that they should cut as deeply as possible. Pope, now roused to a still higher pitch of anger, suffered his rage to blind his judgment, and displacing Theobald, the original hero of the *Dunciad*, exalted Cibber to the unenviable rank, in a new edition of that poem, altered and revised for the purpose. This publication comprehended the whole of the four books, and was ushered into the world with an elaborate preface, and numerous notes from the pen of Warburton, the former tending to exalt the poet, and to degrade the dramatist, in public opinion.

Pope, in this effort of malice, over-reached himself; for Cibber's popularity as a writer had been too fully established, and stood upon too firm a basis, to be injured by so groundless an accusation as that of dulness. Whatever faults he might have possessed, the unfailing vivacity of his style, and the vivid brilliance of his portraitures, whether of fictitious or real characters, must ever exonerate him from a charge, which could only originate in the recklessness of a vindictive spirit. The moral tendency of Cibber's writings; their evident intention to reclaim; to preserve the purity of married life; and to show the charm of virtue, should have secured them from the attacks of a satirist, who, by this blind indulgence of his wrath, proves that he was

actuated by private pique, rather than by a desire to improve the public taste.

The merits of the question, however, so far as they relate to Cibber's fitness to figure as the hero of the *Dunciad*, have been long since settled: the hardship from which his memory suffers consists in the assertion, that he has a better chance of attracting the notice of posterity, on account of having sustained an unjustifiable attack from so celebrated a personage as Pope, than he could hope for from his own productions. This is not true: so long as the stage shall continue to create interest, Cibber, who is justly entitled to be called the father of elegant comedy, will command respect and attention; and even if *The Careless Husband*, and the *The Journey to London*, should cease to attract an audience, they will be read as the earliest, as well as the best, specimens of a distinct species of dramatic writing, which followed the broader comedies of Wycherley and Congreve. It is not too much to say that, as portraitures of fine ladies, the lady Betty Modish, and the lady Townley, of Cibber, have never been surpassed; or, it may be added, approached; while the graphic sketches of his contemporaries, which appear in the justly celebrated *Apology*, afford such striking and such spirited portraits, that readers of taste, anxious to make themselves acquainted with the public favourites of the day, will ever turn to them with delight. Until, therefore, no farther interest can be excited concerning the authors and actors who flourished in an era which produced a new school in dramatic writing, the pages of Cibber will be sought as one of the best authenticated, as well as the most amusing, chronicles of the times. The appearance of the new edition of the *Dunciad* called forth another pamphlet from the pen of the insulted hero, who attacked both Pope and Warburton at the same time, and who, while proving the falsehood of the charge, betrayed more sensibility than would be consistent with the alleged impenetrability of his assurance, and the

shamelessness which gloried in imputations of the most disreputable nature.

It has been justly observed by D'Israeli, that Cibber, whilst endeavouring to preserve the easy gaiety of a heart at ease, showed that he felt the wound which had been inflicted, in all its depth and bitterness. To this most agreeable of antiquaries, Cibber is indebted for a more widely circulated perusal of his rejoinders, than he could have hoped for, had not his cause been taken up by the writer of the curious and entertaining volumes entitled, *The Quarrels of Authors*. Had the letters to Pope been written as appeals to posterity, they would have been less open to censure; but, at the same time, far less valuable; since we should not, in this case, have seen so plainly what was passing in the breast of the author: while frankly disclaiming the title of blockhead, he evidently quivers under the lash applied by a poet whose genius he acknowledges, and whose superiority as a writer, he never disputed; and there is a manifest tendency to deprecate the opinion of the world, or, at least, to cause a diversion in his favour. None of Pope's commentators have attempted to justify his attack upon Cibber, on the score of its applicability; but many have been guilty of great injustice to the unfortunate dramatist, by ascribing the persevering enmity which led to such unmerited censure, to honest indignation against the personal vices of the man, rather than to the true source—some unacknowledged affront. It would be quite as unfair to give credit to all the slanders which have been circulated against Pope's moral character, as to assume that every idle charge preferred against Cibber was founded upon fact. The malevolence of Pope's disposition, and his propensity to libel, which spared not his most intimate and once cherished friends, are too well established to be subjects for dispute. Cibber had given sufficient offence to account for the wrath which ensued; and if the blindness of its fury mistook the proper object, the

cause must be sought in the vindictive malice of Pope, rather than in that noble abhorrence of vice, which, however offensive, would not have been vented by condemnation on an unfounded charge.

It is not easy to decide, at this period of time, how far Cibber might have merited the accusations of profligacy, which have been so profusely showered upon him. Their truth seems to have been taken for granted, without sufficient enquiry into the sources whence they sprang. The gravest of these charges rests upon the authority of avowed enemies; and until they amounted to libels of a very gross description, Cibber appears to have treated them with a careless indifference, which may as fairly be ascribed to a consciousness of their falsehood, as to the unblushing effrontery, which, it is said, rendered him callous to public opinion. Goaded, at length, by the repetition and the violence of these attacks, he made an attempt to discover and to punish the author of a pamphlet entitled, *The Character and Conduct of Sir John Edgar*, which he was anxious to bring home to Dennis. The hostility manifested by the most surly and cynical writer of the time against Cibber, has been imputed to a supposition, upon his part, that he owed the rejection of a tragedy to the interference of the more successful dramatist. A disappointed author affords the very best materials for a critic, and Dennis is proverbial for the reckless nature of his censure, when assailing his adversaries. The greater portion of the evidence upon which subsequent authorities have convicted Cibber of a shameless disregard for every thing that good men delight to honour, has been afforded by the charges brought forward in this pamphlet, which, together with the disgraceful imputations conveyed in the *Dunciad*, and echoed by Warburton, would, if based upon testimony less liable to dispute, be sufficient to brand him with everlasting infamy. There is, however, good reason to suppose that the portrait has been too highly

coloured. Though, perhaps, far from being immaculate, the utter profligacy of mind and manners attributed to Cibber, is so perfectly incompatible with the tone and tenour of all his writings, that some mental perversion seems necessary to reject the internal evidence which they convey, in favour of the malicious invectives of enemies known to have pursued him from motives of personal resentment.

Davies informs us that Cibber was addicted to play; and that he lost his money, and neglected his professional duties, at the same time, by gaming at Tom's coffee-house, when he ought to have been in attendance at the theatre; but the same authority assures us that, notwithstanding these excesses, he stopped short of debt and difficulty, and secured to himself a competence for life, which enabled him to quit the stage before the measure became necessary, in consequence of age and infirmities. He is said to have been a careless husband and an indifferent parent; assertions which we have no opportunity of proving or disproving, very few circumstances connected with his family being known. Of a dozen children which he mentions, we are only enabled to guess how many survived at the period in which he left the stage, by an enquiry into the number of his plays which still kept possession of it; since he tells us that several of the bantlings presented by his muse and his wife, died in their infancy; while an equal number were alive and vigorous at the date of his retirement.

Cibber assuredly owed his appointment as poet laureate more to the influence of his political opinions, than to his talents as a poet: his verses were of a very mediocre description; and the preference thus accorded to a partisan, who could boast no other qualification for the office, must have been very galling to men who felt their own superior claims to advancement as the poet of the court.

In his capacity of manager of a theatre, Cibber appears

to have given offence to several actors and authors; but, in all probability, these are misfortunes which it is impossible, under the circumstances, to avoid. From the account which he has himself afforded of his theatrical directorship, he seems to have had considerable trouble in keeping the peace between his colleagues; and to have shown a placability of disposition, and a willingness to accommodate others, for which his enemies do not give him credit. In companionable qualifications, however, it appears to be universally allowed, that Cibber could scarcely be surpassed; and after his retirement from the stage, his society was courted by all the rising actors and authors of the day. He is represented to have been inimitable in the relation of a story, and so free from all self-sufficiency, as to be ready to admit his own foibles, and to join in the laugh against them; while, though probably rather too exclusive on subjects connected with criticism, he was ungrudging in praise, where he deemed it to be merited.

Cibber, as we have before stated, did not finally quit the stage, when retiring from it; after the sale of his share in the patent, in 1741, appearing occasionally, when it was deemed expedient to strengthen the cast of a play by the return of an old favourite. For these performances he received fifty guineas per night; and the largeness of the sum will prove that his powers of attraction remained undiminished. There is a record of his appearance in the character of Pandulph, the pope's legate, in his own version of *King John*, in 1745, two years before his death, which took place in the 87th year of his age. Cibber survived to witness the total abolition of the old style of theatrical declamation, and the triumph of a more colloquial method, introduced by Garrick; who, descending from the stilts on which tragedy had been exalted, gave the sentiments of his author in a natural and easy manner, which went home to every heart. The old man is stated to have looked upon these innovations with no benignant eye. When Garrick, who

courted his society, and entertained a very respectful opinion of his talents, enquired if he had not one or two MS. comedies in his possession; and if he would permit him the honour of bringing them before the public. Cibber is reported to have asked who could be procured to act them; and, upon Garrick naming Clive, Pritchard, himself, and some others,—to have taken a pinch of snuff, and observed, with a contemptuous nonchalance, "No, it won't do." Upon another occasion, when Garrick declared that the old style had been banished the stage, and would not go down, Cibber sharply enquired how he could know, since he had never tried it: showing, by these little ebullitions of temper, the prejudices of old age rather than envy at the success of the new candidate for public approbation; for, since Cibber could do full justice to his own contemporaries, those who more than shared the applause of an audience with him, it may fairly be inferred that he was sincere in his disapproval of the alterations introduced by the founder of the new school.

Cibber is stated to have made very considerable sums by the sale of his dramatic works, and the presents which he received, according to the custom of the times, in return for his dedications. King George I. gave him 100*l.* upon the publication of *The Nonjuror*, and the justly celebrated *Apology for his Life* is said to have realised 1500*l.* Few persons can rise from the perusal of this latter named work without believing that Cibber was in reality what he represented himself to be, a good-humoured and a good-natured man; one who, though not easily moved to anger, and who seldom suffered his self-complacency to be ruffled, yet could feel justly indignant when assailed by repeated attacks, and pursued by unmerited insult. This lively and entertaining work shows throughout the powers of observation, and the accurate views of men and manners, which Cibber displayed in the most meritorious of his productions, and which formed his chief excellence as an author. As we

have before remarked, his inventive faculties were not of a high order; and, in consequence of the difficulty of striking out new adventures, he was induced to recur to the same incidents, and reconstruct the same characters. The success of the reconciliation scene in *Love's Last Shift*, encouraged him to repeat it again and again; while a family likeness prevails among the principal personages of his drama: lord Foppington, notwithstanding his introduction in two previous plays, *The Fool in Fashion*, and *The Relapse*, figures a third time in *The Careless Husband*. Lady Easy bears a strong resemblance to Amanda, while lady Betty Modish is moulded out of the same materials which form Narcissa; the vain, fanciful, capricious, perverse, but not heartless coquette—for there is always a redeeming point in Cibber's heroines,—is painted to the life, at least the life of her day; when insolence, if united to beauty, and readiness in conversation, however frivolous it might be, held universal empire over the other sex. It is certainly a melancholy fact that women, in becoming more amiable, more reasonable, better informed, and more suited to be companions and friends, are less attractive, and less valued, than when their ignorance and their impertinence rendered them so piquant, and so charming. The youth of folly which led to an old age of cards, must assuredly have been a very brilliant period. The power of the toast of the day was absolute; her vanity, her extravagance, her airs, which were so many graces; her love of mischief, affectation, flippancy, and disregard of the councils of wiser heads, invested her with sovereign power; and her adorers, pleased with ruin, loved to desperation, against their reason, and in defiance of their judgment, rushing into the perilous snare with their eyes wide open. It is only in the old comedies that we can now find these fatal and bewitching creatures; and Cibber, in lady Betty Modish, and lady Townley, has furnished us with some of the most refined specimens of the genus. His sketches of the men of

fashion of his day were not less finished, whether they regarded mere things of brocaded coats and essenced periwigs, or the more sterling scions of the nobility. The lord Moreloves, lord Townleys, and sir Charles Easys, of his creation, were accurate portraitures of the class they represented, bringing upon this stage the superior polish and high breeding acquired by their prototypes, by early association with well educated persons, by foreign travel, and familiarity with courts. In the dedication of *The Careless Husband* to the duke of Argyle, the author very neatly attributes the felicity of the dialogue, and its close approximation to the manners of high life, to the opportunities which he enjoyed of studying the most perfect model in the society of a nobleman, distinguished for his talents and accomplishments. Cibber was certainly the first person who attempted to transfer the language of the drawing-room to the stage, and who endeavoured to reform the public taste, by appealing to the best feelings of an audience; and both these laudable efforts were crowned with success. It is scarcely possible to contemplate any state of the stage too refined to permit the comedies on which his fame as a dramatic writer must chiefly depend, namely, *The Careless Husband*, and *The Journey to London*, to afford gratification to an audience. This is the more creditable to him, since there has been considerable difficulty in rendering one single comedy of Wycherley's endurable upon the stage; while the far more witty productions of Congreve remain sealed books, and are totally unpresentable in any shape, defying the severest application of the pruning knife. The dramas emanating from Cibber's pen, still to be mentioned, though amusing enough, are more numerous than valuable, the best being borrowed from previous writers. Amid these the *Double Gallant* was partly taken from a French comedy, partly from what the compiler considered tolerable in two or three plays, which had been acted without success; while for the *Refusal* he was indebted to the same sources. A ballad opera, entitled *Love in a Riddle*,

was hooted from the stage on the two nights of its representation, not entirely in consequence of its own demerits; (since, being cut down, it was afterwards performed with great success, under the title of *Damon and Phillida;*) but on account of an arbitrary restriction of the government, which interfered to prevent the representation of the *Polly* of Gay, a continuation of *The Beggar's Opera.* Incensed by this injustice towards their favourite, and by a report industriously circulated that Cibber's interest at court had occasioned the suppression of the more popular author's play, the audience avenged itself upon the supposed delinquent, and only consented to hear his piece out the second night, upon condition that it should not be repeated. Subsequently, being smuggled upon the stage, without provoking opposition by naming the author, it was received with great applause; and continued to be a stock piece during many succeeding years. Of Cibber's tragedy, with the exception of his revival of Shakspeare, the less that is said the better; but an anecdote, connected with the failure of *Cæsar in Egypt,* shows how little acerbity was mingled with the mortification of the disappointed author. When his brother managers were lamenting over the fruitless expense which they had incurred, and insisting upon the withdrawal of a play which now proved so unattractive, Cibber good-humouredly gave up the point, consoling himself, and amusing his colleagues, by observing that it was not in the destiny of Cæsar to run. The decline of our author's life seems to have been particularly fortunate; he had saved sufficient money, during the latter part of the more active period, to render him, together with the salary attached to the laureateship, comfortable in his old age. His death is represented to have been tranquil, though sudden. He had spoken cheerfully to an attendant at six o'clock in the morning, and was found a corpse at nine; having, from his attitude of repose, in all probability, expired in his sleep. This occurrence took place on the 12th of December, 1757, at his lodgings in Islington, shortly

after the completion of the 86th year of his age. He is stated to have bequeathed his property to his grand-children. In the chronicles of the times, mention is only made of a son and daughter who survived him; the former, Theophilus Cibber, inheriting only a small portion of his father's peculiar talents, ran a career of vice and extravagance, which ended in an untimely death. Of the daughter, very few anecdotes are preserved; she went upon the stage, but was not distinguished as an actress; the only remarkable circumstance recorded concerning her, being the personation of a character in a play of Fielding's, in which she was made to libel her own father by the recitation of a new year's day ode, written in ridicule of the laureate.

SUSANNA CENTLIVRE.

(16 —1723.)

The early portion of Mrs. Susanna Centlivre's life is involved in obscurity, no record being extant either of the date of her birth or the scene of her birth-place. Her father, a country gentleman named Freeman, of great respectability, possessed of a good estate at Holbeach in Lincolnshire, having embroiled himself very deeply in the affairs of the commonwealth, was obliged to fly the country at the restoration of Charles II.; both his political and his religious principles,—he being a staunch dissenter,—involving him in difficulties with the new government. The utter ruin of the whole family ensued, since he had married the daughter of a gentleman of Lyme Regis, a Mr. Markham, who, embracing the same cause, suffered the same penalties; the estates of both being confiscated, and both being compelled to take refuge from further persecution in Ireland, where they existed upon the trifling sums which they had saved from the general wreck.

The period of Mr. Freeman's residence in Ireland, and the date of his death, cannot now be ascertained; nor is it certainly known whether he had contracted a second marriage previously to the latter event,—the accounts respecting the situation in which he left his daughter at the time of his decease being very contradictory. One writer states that she was committed to the guardianship of an unkind stepmother, while others make no mention of her father's second marriage. There is a difference of opinion respecting the period of Mrs. Centlivre's birth, in the slight notices concerning her which have been preserved; and it is impossible now to decide whether it occurred in the

year 1667 or in 1680. All her biographers, however, unite in stating that she was thrown upon the world at a very early age; and as there can be no doubt, from the evidence afforded by her dramatic writings, that she, by some means, contrived to obtain an education of singular excellence, considering the amount of instruction usually bestowed upon females of her era. An incident in her life, related by Whincop, which would account for these acquirements, seems worthy of credit.

This author, who appears to have taken considerable pains to acquaint himself with the history of the dramatic writers of his own times, tells us, that although the period in which Mrs. Centlivre enjoyed the advantages of a collegiate education was rather brief, a favourable opportunity offered itself of studying under an able tutor at Cambridge. It appears by Whincop's story, that the young orphan, being exceedingly ill-treated by the persons to whose care she had been intrusted, formed a romantic determination to seek her fortune in London. The fertile imagination which subsequently displayed itself in her comedies, in all probability prompted this rash step,—the spirit of adventure being always found existing in a stronger degree in persons of a creative temperament than in those who regard life in a dull matter-of-fact point of view. Though the pecuniary finances of the fair fugitive were of a very slender description, she resolutely undertook the expedition alone, and on foot; but had not proceeded far, before, overcome with the fatigue of the journey and with anxious thoughts, she sate down on a bank by the road-side. The hardness of the fate which had driven her thus into the wide world, and the melancholy nature of her prospects, now presented themselves to a mind wearied and depressed, and, bursting into tears, she gave way to sighs and lamentations. At this juncture a gentleman, then a student of the university of Cambridge, and afterwards well known to the world of letters, the somewhat celebrated Anthony Hammond, happened to pass along the road.

The sight of beauty in affliction, together with the extreme youth of the distressed damsel, who was scarcely fifteen years old at the time, touched the stranger's heart, and, inquiring the cause of her tears, he displayed a degree of sympathy in her sufferings well calculated to inspire her with confidence. The story which she related, deepened the impression in her favour, while the charms of her person, and the simplicity of her manners, completed her conquest over a very susceptible heart.

Friendless and destitute, and having lately suffered acutely from a sense of the forlorn nature of her condition, the unhappy girl suffered herself to be prevailed upon to accept the stranger's offered protection. Accompanying him to a village in the neighbourhood of the university, she consented to a precaution necessary for the concealment of her real position, and assuming male attire was introduced into the college to which her lover belonged, in the character of a cousin. Fortunately, considering all the circumstances of the case, the person to whom this young and inexperienced girl had so rashly intrusted herself, was a sincere lover of letters; he cultivated the mind which he might have corrupted, and took great pains to improve the taste and talents of his fair companion. Being an apt scholar, and thirsting after the attainment of knowledge, she eagerly availed herself of the advantages thus offered, making the most of every hour devoted to instruction. There can be little doubt that the love of literature, afterwards so strongly manifested, was displayed at this early period; for we are told by Jacob, that Mrs. Centlivre, when very young, showed an extraordinary inclination for poetry, having composed a song before she was seven years old. Such a pupil must have delighted an intellectual mind; and unless we yield credit to the detail given by Whincop of the circumstances which favoured her studious disposition, we have no means of accounting for the learning which is evinced throughout her works.

The connection so hastily and unadvisedly formed, was not of long duration, nor does it appear to have been productive of any thing like lasting affection upon either side. After a residence of some months at the university, suspicions respecting the truth arose; or the gentleman desired to put an end to an intercourse which began to grow wearisome. We are told, however, that he did not wholly abandon his fair companion, when he deemed it expedient to part with her; sending her to London amply supplied with money, and placing her under the care of a respectable female, with a request that she would treat her as the daughter of a deceased friend. The parties thus separated, did not meet afterwards for many years, and never renewed a connection formed rather by chance than sentiment. Mr. Hammond engaged in public life, and having made, according to his ideas of the claims upon him, an adequate provision for the object of a very brief attachment, troubled himself no more about her.

The lady did not waste her time in vain regrets; she continued to cultivate her mind; acquiring the French language, and reading the best authors in her own. Naturally fond of amusement, she was to be seen at the popular entertainments of the day; and, in a short time after her arrival in London, entered into a new engagement with one of her numerous admirers. Whincop leaves it doubtful whether this second attachment was of the same nature as the first, stating that she was "married, or something like it, to a nephew of the late sir Stephen Fox." Other biographers take the fact of the marriage for granted; but a twelvemonth sufficed to dissolve the union, of whatever description it might be. Subsequently she became the wife of a gentleman named Carroll, a young military man, who was most unfortunately killed in a duel about eighteen months after the celebration of the nuptials. She was still very young when thus left a widow; and having entertained a sincere affection for her husband,

was most sensibly afflicted by his death, — an affliction rendered still more poignant by the want of a suitable provision. Thus left to her own resources for the means of obtaining a subsistence, she turned her thoughts to dramatic composition; but a considerable time elapsed before she attained to any eminence as a writer for the stage.

Her first attempt, a tragedy, proved a very mediocre performance; and as she was absolutely destitute of the patronage at this time liberally extended by noblemen to the aspirants for literary fame, she met with little or no encouragement to persevere. But though this early effort proved unsuccessful, Mrs. Centlivre was supported under her disappointment by the consciousness of latent talent; and stimulated only by her own ardour in the pursuit, she made a fresh attempt.

Being acquainted with the French language, and perhaps somewhat distrustful of her ability to produce an original comedy, she borrowed the plot of her next work, a comedy entitled *Love at a Venture*, from a French author, offering it at the theatre in Drury Lane, where it was rejected. This disappointment obliged her to seek the means of earning her subsistence through some other channel; and her natural taste inclining towards the theatrical profession, she procured an engagement at Bath, where she made her appearance in one of the characters in her own play. Subsequently she accused Colley Cibber, who brought out a comedy, entitled *The Double Gallant*, evidently borrowed from the source whence she had derived the materials for her play, of pirating her work. The manager of Drury Lane was, however, well acquainted with the French language, and might have applied to the original author, though in all probability his attention was directed to the subject by the hint which she had afforded.

Persevering, in despite of the difficulties which she encountered, she succeeded in procuring the representation of three pieces,—*The Beau's Duel, The Stolen Heiress*, and *The Gamester*,— at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields;

the latter named, which was a translation from a French comedy, was acted with great applause, and probably led to the production of *The Basset Table*, and *Love's Contrivances*, at Drury Lane. Meanwhile the profits of these comedies not being sufficient for her support, she continued upon the stage without much hope of ever rising to eminence in her profession. Her talents were not sufficiently brilliant to attract attention in London, and having no engagement in the metropolis, she was compelled to attach herself to a strolling company. The wanderings of these itinerants brought them at length to Windsor, where, fortunately for the lady, the court had established itself. Either a paucity of male performers equal to the undertaking, or her own particular passion for the tragic line, induced our heroine to assume male attire, and to enact the character of *Alexander the Great*. Although the rant and bluster with which Lee, himself not sane, invested the Macedonian madman, would appear to render the part peculiarly unfitted for a woman, in the present instance it became so attractive in the eyes of one of the audience, that the performance led to a proposal of marriage. Mr. Joseph Centlivre, the party in question, held a situation about the court—that of one of her majesty's cooks—more lucrative than dignified. He seems to have been a respectable, well-conducted person, able to offer his wife a comfortable home; and proving a successful wooer, the marriage was celebrated in 1706.

From this period Mrs. Centlivre enjoyed every advantage which a residence in London, and freedom from pecuniary anxieties, could afford; but though no longer compelled to write for bread, she did not allow her talents to remain idle, and, still ambitious of public applause, continued to produce new works. Hitherto, notwithstanding the success which had attended the representation of her comedies, she had not obtained any thing like reputation as an author, and still experienced considerable difficulty in bringing out her plays upon the stage. It is not very often that an accurate

judgment is formed respecting the merits of any dramatic production previous to its representation. Those very persons who, from their theatrical experience, might be supposed to be qualified to give an opinion upon the subject, being very frequently wrong. The favourable report of the Green-room is not always confirmed by the success of a new play, and it often happens that evil auguries are followed by the most brilliant triumphs.

Having completed the comedy of *The Busy Body* for the stage, Mrs. Centlivre endeavoured for some time, in vain, to procure its acceptance. The season was allowed nearly to pass away before the manager of Drury Lane could be prevailed upon to hazard its trial; and when at length it was put into rehearsal, a new obstacle presented itself. Mr. Wilks, who had undertaken the character of *Sir George Airy*, conceived an unconquerable dislike to the part. Pacing disdainfully up and down the stage with the MS. in his hand, his distaste increasing at every line, he at last got into a violent rage, and throwing the paper into the pit, declared that nobody would sit to listen to such stuff. Mrs. Centlivre, who was present, in great alarm, and with tears in her eyes, entreated him to give her work a fair chance with the public, and Wilks very ungraciously took up the part again, muttering all the while. Still the representation was delayed; and its announcement, which did not take place until towards the end of April, was not attended by any note of preparation. The theatre at this period affording the only source of intellectual gratification, a very considerable degree of interest was usually excited by the production of a new play; people talked about it long before its representation, and the house was generally filled on the first night. The *Busy Body* however, was not puffed into notice by any of the usual methods,—it being scarcely mentioned, and if spoken of at all, merely as "a silly thing written by a woman, of which the players entertained a low opinion."

In consequence of this unfavourable report, the house was so thinly attended on the first night of repre-

sentation, that there was scarcely sufficient money taken at the doors to defray the expenses. The theatre was, in fact, entirely deserted, excepting by those persons who, accustomed to spend their evenings from home, and having literally no where else to go, were at a loss for a better method of beguiling the time; the few spectators strolling in without the slightest expectation of being amused. A miserable account of empty benches, and an audience which, not entertaining a hope of any thing tolerable, yawned over the first scenes, did not prove very inspiriting to the actors. The aspect of things improved, however, as the play went on; the audience, speedily awakened to attention, began to listen with delight and interest to what was passing on the stage; laughter and applause echoed through the empty walls; and the comedy concluded with all the demonstrations of success which the limited number of the spectators could bestow. On the second night the house was much better filled, though still by no means crowded —a triumph reserved for the third representation, the author's night as it was called; the town having by that time been attracted by the report of the critics, which was in the highest degree favourable. *The Busy Body* ran for thirteen nights without the slightest diminution either in the audience or in the applause; its career ending only with the close of the season. In the following year, the Drury Lane company having divided, the high estimation in which Mrs. Centlivre's bustling comedy was held by the public was manifested by both parties playing it, one against the other, for six nights in succession; Pack, the original *Marplot*, retaining the character at Drury Lane, and Doggett performing it at the rival theatre in the Haymarket. *The Busy Body* still keeps the stage; for, though many years have elapsed since its performance in London, where various circumstances combine to limit the regular stock pieces within very narrow bounds, it continues to find favour in the country, being not unfrequently acted at some of the most distinguished of the provincial theatres.

A continuation of *The Busy Body*, under the title of *Marplot*, shared the fate of similar attempts to carry on the interest of a popular character in a second series of adventures, and, not particularly successful at the time, is now forgotten. Two or three other comedies followed, neither remarkable for their merit, nor calculated to advance the reputation of their author. To one, entitled *The Perplexed Lovers*, acted at Drury Lane in 1711, a poem was appended, inscribed to prince Eugene of Savoy, who had newly arrived in England; and as, in those days, it was the fashion to pay for poetical praise in very substantial metal, the prince gave in return a handsome and weighty gold snuff-box, valued at about five and thirty pounds. Mrs. Centlivre's next dramatic production, *The Wonder, or a Woman keeps a Secret*, raised her at once to a very high rank amid the writers of comedy. The busy, bustling nature of the plot, the excellence of the situations which it affords, and the skilful portraiture of the characters, have, in themselves, without much assistance from the dialogue, which, though pertinent and lively, has little or no pretensions to wit, enabled this play to keep the stage down to the present day. *Felix* and *Violante* still find favour in the eyes of an audience, and are still selected by our best actors and actresses, as characters in which their talents may be displayed to advantage.

Recollections, probably, of the distresses and losses sustained by her family at the return of the Stuarts, or the principles inculcated at a very early age, rendered Mrs. Centlivre a staunch whig; and upon this occasion she showed her attachment to the house of Hanover, by dedicating her comedy to George I., then duke of Cambridge. Upon his accession to the throne, the king indicated his satisfaction at this mark of respect, by bespeaking the play, which the royal family graced with their presence, and by making the author a handsome present. A tragedy, the lady's next attempt, entitled *The Cruel Gift*, is said to have been assisted by a few touches from the pen of Mrs. Rowe; they were not,

however, sufficient to save it from oblivion; but the dedication to Eustace Budgell produced a diamond ring in return,—one of those good old customs which are gone out of fashion.

Mrs. Centlivre was particularly fortunate in meeting with liberal patronage; for subsequently, upon printing a farce never acted, called *The Gotham Election*, she received a present of twenty guineas from Mr. Craggs, who was induced, by the representations of Mrs. Bracegirdle, to permit his name to be placed to the dedication. The author, surprised at the amount, caused the munificent donor to be told that it far exceeded her expectations from a drama which had not been represented on the stage; whereupon Mr. Craggs replied, that "he considered not so much the merit of the piece, as what was proper to be done by a secretary of state." One or two other dramas of little note added, however, a diamond ring valued at twenty guineas, the present of colonel Earle, to the catalogue of Mrs. Centlivre's effects, which in plate and jewels much exceeded the usual display made by the poets of her time,—many being presents, and others purchased out of the profits of her copyrights.

Mrs. Centlivre, in 1718, achieved another triumph, increasing her laurels, by the production of *A Bold Stroke for a Wife;* on which occasion it is said that Mr. Wilks hazarded a prediction quite as erroneous as that he had formerly pronounced respecting *The Busy Body.* He declared, that "not only would the play be damned, but that she herself would be damned for writing it." It was, however, brilliantly successful, and may still be said to keep the stage. The character of *Colonel Feignwell* affords so good an opportunity for a comic actor to display the versatility of his powers, that until succeeded by a host of others, written upon its model expressly for the same purpose, it was usually selected by those performers who desired to show how easily they could personate men of different countries and pursuits. Whincop tells us that Mrs. Centlivre

derived some assistance in this play from the pen of a male friend, who wrote one or two entire scenes,—Mr. Mottley, an ingenious gentleman, to whom the world is indebted for the volume of facetiæ which bears the title of "Joe Miller's Jests."

Although there is no record of impropriety of conduct on the part of Mrs. Centlivre, after she had surmounted the dangers into which she was led by youthful indiscretion, yet, perhaps in consequence of mixing in society not altogether free from taint, a degree of licentiousness pervades the dialogues of her dramas, which is much to be lamented. The aim is certainly to amuse, rather than to instruct or reform; and if the general tone of conversation, and the state of moral feeling at the time, are to be gathered from the unscrupulous nature of the allusions which emanated from female pens, we have reason to be thankful for the improvements which have taken place in both.

Mrs. Centlivre is stated to have lived in great respectability from the period of her last marriage, and to have conducted the affairs of her household with more propriety than is usually observed by a class of persons proverbial for their inattention to domestic concerns. The terms, however, employed in this commendation, are not very refined; it is said that "she lived in a decent, clean manner, and could show, what few other poets could, who depended chiefly on their pen, a great many jewels and pieces of plate." Her house in Spring Gardens was frequented by the wits of the day, and was honoured by the visits of sir Richard Steele, Mr. Rowe, Eustace Budgell, Dr. Jewell Farquhar, Mr. Amhurst, and others. The strong political bias displayed in her writings, though attaching many persons who espoused the same cause, also created a considerable number of enemies; this partisanship, and, it is said, a ballad written in a strain which proved offensive to the translator of Homer, procured for her a niche in the Dunciad. Pope was not very particular respecting the justice of his censure; a personal affront being quite sufficient to pro-

voke satire, levelled indiscriminately at all who had the misfortune to incur his displeasure; and though Mrs. Centlivre might have no pretensions to first rate excellence as a dramatic writer, the author of *The Busy Body, The Wonder*, and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, could not, without the greatest injustice, be classed amongst dunces.

After living for several years in the enjoyment of every domestic comfort, Mrs. Centlivre died at the house of her husband in Spring Gardens, on the 1st of December, 1723, and was buried in the parish church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Her plays, eighteen in number, were collected and published in three volumes, in 1761; a work now out of print, and difficult to find. With the three brilliant exceptions before mentioned, these dramas are now only to be regarded as mere literary curiosities; they show considerable observation, and a familiar acquaintance with men and manners, but contain nothing very touching, poignant, or profound. The characters are justly drawn, the dialogue smart, and suited to the occasion: but the chief merit lies in the construction of the plots; the succession of striking incidents, which keep up the interest to the last; and the capabilities which the chief personages afford to clever actors, who are placed in situations rendered exceedingly effective when in skilful hands. Though so well adapted for the stage, Mrs. Centlivre's comedies prove very amusing in the closet: the coarseness of the language, it is true, occasionally detracts from the gratification which the perusal affords; but they will bear pruning—these indecorums not being so intimately blended with the plot, as to be inseparably connected with it.

In private life, we are told, that Mrs. Centlivre was much beloved for the good nature, benevolence, and friendliness of her disposition. She is stated to have possessed a considerable share of beauty, together with great conversational talents, and an intelligent, well-informed mind, always eager for improvement. Desultory as

her education must have been, she managed to acquire a vast fund of knowledge, and to read deeply, and with infinite profit to herself. The topics discussed, or touched upon, throughout her comedies, show a very extensive course of study; and she displays also an acquaintance with several foreign languages — not only being a good French scholar, and understanding a little Latin, bnt appearing to have made some progress in the acquisition of the dialects of Spain and Holland.

ARTHUR MURPHY.

(1727—1805.)

Arthur Murphy, the second son of a respectable merchant in Dublin, was born on the 27th of December, 1727, at Clooniquin, the house of the eldest brother of his mother, Arthur French, who resided near Elphin, in the county of Roscommon. He had the misfortune to lose his father at a very early age. The elder Murphy sailed in one of his own vessels to Philadelphia, in 1729, and the ship, never afterwards heard of, was supposed to have foundered at sea. Mrs. Murphy continued to reside at her house in Dublin during several years after her widowhood; but in consequence of the advice of her brother, Jeffrey French, who was established in London, she sold her property in Ireland and removed with her two young sons, James and Arthur, to the English metropolis. In the following year, 1736, Arthur, being invited to take up his abode with an aunt who was settled at Boulogne, went over to France, and having remained in the family of this lady until 1738, was, at ten years old, sent to the English college at St. Omers, where he remained during the ensuing six years, wholly engrossed by his studies, and gaining the esteem and approbation of his masters.

In July 1744 he returned to London, and was cordially welcomed by his mother and his elder brother James; but the nature of his studies, and his devotion to classic authors, were not calculated to please his uncle, Jeffrey French, who had risen in the world by his attention to trade, and was now member of Parliament for Milbourn Port. Questioning the young man respecting his acquirements, he expressed the utmost contempt for his knowledge of Latin; and, recommending

him to study Cocker's arithmetic, and to abjure the Roman catholic religion, he drove off in his chariot, leaving a very disagreeable impression upon the mind of his nephew. James Murphy, who had been educated at Westminster school, and was now about to enter the Temple as a law student, felt likewise exceedingly desirous that his brother, who had attended mass while at college—and had probably been prejudiced in favour of the papal creed, during his residence in the family of his aunt—should embrace protestantism, and never desisted from his endeavours to promote this object until his representations met with the desired success.

The diminished resources of the family, obliged Arthur Murphy to look to his uncle Jeffrey for patronage—and, indeed, for support; and, unfortunately, the narrow mind of this man could admit but of one idea respecting the art of rising in the world. The fine talents of his nephew, the love of learning, and the elegant accomplishments which he displayed, made no impression except in his disfavour; and, determined that the dependent upon his bounty should pursue the path which he himself had trodden, he placed him as a clerk in the establishment of an eminent merchant of Cork. Three years residence in London had given young Arthur a taste for its intellectual qualifications, which rendered an exile to a mercantile city almost insupportable. The allowance which he received from his uncle was niggardly in the extreme; his companions very ill suited to a mind of the first order; while the duties which he was called upon to perform became irksome and hateful. He seems, however, to have made an effort to reconcile himself to the mode of life to which he was condemned, and to give serious attention to the employment marked out for him, trusting that by his assiduity he should induce his uncle to set him fairly afloat in the world. Believing that he had attained the knowledge of business requisite for some higher department, he wrote to Mr. Jeffrey French upon the subject of his future destination, and received in answer a summons to Dublin. Upon

his arrival in the Irish metropolis, instead of meeting his uncle, as he had expected, he found instructions which directed him to embark on board a vessel bound for Jamaica, at which place Jeffrey French possessed a large estate. A step of such importance could not be taken without great consideration. Arthur Murphy therefore wrote immediately to his mother, to ask her advice upon the subject; and she, without the slightest hesitation, desired her son to join her in London.

Jeffrey French, who seems to have been the meanest of despots, would not admit that his nephew had a right to remonstrate against his dictates, and instantly withdrew his countenance and support, imputing what he termed the wilful disobedience of his nephew to a love of idleness: Arthur, in order to remove this suspicion, entered into the service of alderman Ironside, then a banker in Lombard-street, who kindly offered him a situation in his counting-house. At the expiration of twelve months,—the resentment of the uncle remaining unabated,—young Murphy no longer considered it necessary to place a restraint upon his inclinations, in the vain attempt to appease an implacable relative; and, quitting the ledger, threw himself upon the resources of his own vigorous mind. At the early age of twenty-two, our unfledged author commenced the preparation of a series of literary papers, which came out in weekly numbers on the 21st of October 1752, under the title of *The Gray's-Inn Journal*, and which kept their ground during the two succeeding years. Arthur Murphy had already obtained the acquaintance of several gentlemen of the highest eminence both in station and talent, and his literary pursuits brought him into contact with the most celebrated wits about town; and, amongst other men of genius, he became known to Doctor Johnson, with whom he remained upon terms of intimacy until the death of the great lexicographer. The decease of Jeffrey French, which took place in the beginning of May 1754, destroyed all the expectations which his nephew still

entertained from that quarter: the name of Arthur Murphy did not appear in the will; and, being now involved in debt, amounting to 300*l.*, it was necessary to devise some method to clear himself from so dangerous an incumbrance.

Highly endowed with those natural gifts which seem to promise success upon the stage, possessed of a handsome countenance, a commanding figure, a fine voice, and an accurate conception of character, Arthur Murphy was persuaded to make his appearance at Covent-garden. This advice, which he informs us was given by his friend Foote, he was induced to take in consequence of an expectation that his mother's relatives, who were rich and numerous, would come forward in order to prevent what they would naturally consider a disgrace to the family. This hope being frustrated by the indifference manifested upon the subject, he pursued his new avocation long enough to liquidate his debts, and to accumulate a sum sufficient to enable him to commence the study of the law.

Though not attaining to great eminence as an actor, Murphy kept possession of the leading characters during the period of his theatrical engagements; but either feeling no inclination to persevere, or being convinced that he was not calculated to make a distinguished figure on the boards, he retired as soon as prudence allowed him to relinquish his salary. In the course of his first season, his expenditure being of a very economical nature, he contrived to pay off a considerable portion of his debts; and, in the next year, having accepted an engagement at Drury-lane, his exchequer was further increased by the profits of a benefit, and by the successful representation of his first dramatic production. Garrick furnished one of his excellent prologues to *The Apprentice;* a work claiming the character of genuine farce, and founded upon observations of folly, which will prevail more or less as long as theatres have any existence. The *dramatis personæ,* though laughably extravagant, are drawn from

nature, *Wingate* being taken from the muckworm uncle, Jeffery French, while every spouting club afforded materials for *Dick*. The intrinsic merits of this after-piece, together with the admirable acting of Woodward in the stage-struck hero, were felt and acknowledged by an applauding audience ; and its receipts, added to those of his benefit, rendered its author comparatively independent. Murphy now determined to go to the bar ; and proposed, in the first instance, to enter himself as a student of the Middle Temple. The benchers, however, of that society,—prejudiced against the candidate on account of his late employment,—refused him admittance ; and he must perhaps have relinquished the legal profession, but for the kind interference of Mr. Fox, afterwards lord Holland. Murphy had complained of the treatment received upon this occasion ; and, having espoused the cause of Mr. Fox, (which he advocated very strenuously in a paper called the *Test*), he was invited to dine at Holland House. In the course of conversation at table, Mr. Fox expressed his opinion without reserve, on the subject of the illiberal conduct of the benchers of the Temple ; and, shortly afterwards, he intimated to Mr. Murphy, that lord Mansfield had taken the matter up, assuring him, that should he offer himself at Lincoln's-inn, he would be handsomely received.

There is no professional union more common than that between law and literature. Whilst studying for the bar, Murphy was compelled to trust entirely to the products of his pen for his support ; he continued, therefore, to write for the political paper which had introduced him to the notice of Mr. Fox, and to prepare dramas for the stage. A farce, entitled *The Englishman from Paris*, (produced at his own benefit, and acted only one night, in consequence of the same subject having been taken up by Foote) and a *jeu d'esprit*, called *The Spouter*, (published but not acted, and omitted in the collection of his works) were now succeeded by the admirable farce of *The Upholsterer*. The name of *Quidnunc*, which has

become a household word, instantly calls up in the mind images of the insatiable newsmonger, the anxious, restless, politician, neglectful of his own affairs, and filled with anxiety for the destiny of Europe, while the mismanagement of his domestic concerns is conducting him to ruin. Garrick, though duly appreciating the merits of this production, entertained a most courtier-like dread of offending the ruling powers. He was afraid that the intermeddling with political questions mooted at the time, might prejudice the interests of the theatre, and therefore would have nothing to say to it, until the lord-chamberlain having expressed his approbation of the piece, the manager's apprehensions thus happily removed, *The Upholsterer* was permitted to make his bow to an audience. The season was rapidly passing away before this delicate affair could be arranged to general satisfaction; and Murphy, unwilling to submit to further delay, the new farce was brought out for the benefit of Mr. Mossop, and was received with unanimous applause. The idea is avowedly taken from one of Addison's admirable sketches, but wrought out with consummate skill; it affords the widest scope for the display of comic powers, many successive actors delighting the town by the personation of the anxious and enthusiastic politician.

In 1759 Murphy had the misfortune to lose his only brother, a gentleman of the highest attainments, with whom he had ever lived upon terms of affection and confidence. James Murphy French, in assuming the name of his uncle, entertained expectations of succeeding to the bulk of his property; but the mental gifts which would have recommended him to a more generous spirit, proved obstacles in the way of advancement with a man wholly given up to sordid considerations. At an early period these uncongenial relatives quarrelled; and, disappointed of his promised inheritance, James Murphy French, who had been somewhat improvident, found it advisable to go out to practise as a barrister at Jamaica, where he died seventeen weeks after his departure from

England. In addition to his regret at the loss of so near and dear a kinsman, Arthur Murphy, in becoming answerable for his deceased brother's debts, had incumbered himself with a heavy responsibility; but, applying himself manfully to the literary labours which alone offered the means of satisfying the just demands of rather numerous creditors, he eventually succeeded in paying the whole amount. Had D'Israeli included in his entertaining selection of *The Quarrels of Authors* those between literary managers and dramatic writers, the disagreements of Garrick and Murphy would have, doubtless, found a place. The lofty, stern, uncompromising mind of the one, and the versatile, time-serving, and somewhat flippant arrogance of the other, could scarcely fail to produce a collision.

Murphy highly disapproved of what he considered an audacious intermeddling on the part of Garrick with the plays of Shakspeare; and Garrick, who had engaged to bring out a tragedy of Murphy's, called *The Orphan of China*, in the ensuing season, sent it back to the author, with the mortifying assurance that it was wholly unfit for the stage. Murphy, determined to appeal to the public against a decision which he considered to be unjust: immediately, and certainly unadvisedly, commenced a paper war; and, after a long controversy, and the interference of several parties, Garrick was compelled to consent to give the play a trial. The opinion of posterity has confirmed that of the manager in this case; for the *Orphan of China*, though very warmly received on its first representation, did not keep possession of the stage. It owed, perhaps, a great portion of its success to the state of public feeling at the time; the determination on the part of the august body which, at this period, composed the pit, to resist an attempt made by the managers to degrade the legitimate drama, by the introduction of ballets and dances, on boards which had previously been held sacred to a higher school of acting. The expensive preparations for a grand ballet of action, called *The Chinese Festival*, to be performed

by foreign dancers, were, in consequence of the disapprobation of the audience, afterwards devoted to a better purpose, and assisted in the triumphs of Murphy's tragedy. The success of *The Orphan of China* reconciled the manager to the necessity of its representation against his imperial will and pleasure, and a good understanding was restored between him and the author; who seems, upon all occasions, to have very willingly accepted the olive-branch.

Had the reputation of Murphy rested solely upon his tragic writings, he would have had little title to lasting fame. Notwithstanding his admiration for Shakspeare, and his capability of appreciating all the beauties of that exquisite genius, he made no attempt to pursue the same bold track, contenting himself with the turgid, pompous declamation which were the characteristics of the serious drama of his time. *The Orphan of China*, which was brought out in 1759, was followed in the ensuing year by two pieces, represented, for the first time, on the same night, but very different both in merit and in fortune. *The Desert Island*, a dramatic poem in three acts, taken from Metastasio, devoid of action, plot, or character, may be admired in the closet for the elegance of its versification, but could never be calculated to succeed upon the stage. *The Way to Keep Him* —originally produced in three acts, and distinguished throughout by the easy vivacity of its dialogue, the truth and nature of its characters, and the interest and simplicity of its plot—possessed much higher pretensions, and was performed to delighted audiences long after its heavy companion had sunk into oblivion. Many persons are of opinion, that the extension of this comedy into five acts, and the introduction of two new characters — Sir Bashful, and Lady Constant—have been rather injurious than beneficial to the play. It was, however, very well received at the time in its altered state, and has remained a favourite with the public ever since. Though the character of Sir Bashful Constant is liable to much misconception, many of the low comedy actors to which

it is entrusted, rendering it irredeemably contemptible, it rises into consequence, and even respect, in more judicious hands. Few persons can now remember the excellence of Mr. Keasberry—the manager of the Bath theatre, and a contemporary of Henderson—in this part; but all who have had the advantage of seeing Mr. W. Farren's exquisite delineation of affection, subdued by the apprehension of ridicule, will allow that it possesses great capabilities for the display of superior talent.

In 1761, while the altered version of *The Way to keep Him* was delighting the town, the death of his mother plunged the author into profound affliction. Feeling unable to enter society during the first ebullition of his grief, he withdrew himself from his accustomed haunts, and was only heard of by his old associates, as the writer of a comedy, which he sent to Garrick. The manager approved of *All in the Wrong*, and would have appeared in the character of sir John Restless, had the representation been delayed until the winter season. Murphy, however, in conjunction with Foote, rented Drury-lane theatre for the summer months; and both the lessees engaging to furnish three new plays: *All in the Wrong* was produced in consequence of this agreement. Though not equal in point of merit to *The Way to keep Him*, nor calculated to maintain the lasting favour of the public, the new comedy was justly successful at the time, and is still occasionally acted on provincial boards. Jealousy is, perhaps, rendered too predominant a characteristic in this play; which, while busy, bustling, and amusing, wants variety, and in this respect it is inferior to Colman's illustration of the same passion: lady Restless, however, has the merit of being a more refined impersonation of the feeling than Mrs. Oakley, who has too much of the virago in her composition to excite interest. Notwithstanding the felicitous manner in which the perplexities of the scene are kept up to the last, the want of variety and importance in the principal characters prevents them from becoming favourites either with the public, or with

actors, who have no opportunity of making, what in theatrical parlance, is called a hit, by the performance of any one of the *dramatis personæ*. Even the fidgetty, anxious, and unreasonable hero and heroine, afford few opportunities for the display of first-rate talent, while Beverley and Belinda have the disadvantage of considerable resemblance, with great inferiority.

The success of *All in the Wrong* induced Garrick to bring it out in the ensuing winter; but conceiving it to be beneath his dignity to appear in a character previously performed by Mr. Yates, the comedy was deprived of the powerful support which he would have given by his representation of Sir John Restless.

Murphy fulfilled his engagement with Foote, by producing two farces in addition to *All in the Wrong; The Citizen*, and *The Old Maid*, which were performed on the same night, in the summer of 1761. Posterity has reversed the decree pronounced upon this occasion. *The Old Maid*, which obtained great success at the time of its representation, being now entirely laid aside; while *The Citizen*, which was not so well received, has become a stock piece. During his enforced attendance in a counting-house, the apparently idle clerk was busily employed in taking notes of the various oddities which he found to the eastward of Temple-bar. To Murphy's acute observations at this early period, the public are indebted for those spirited delineations of character, which, founded upon truth and nature, can never grow obsolete. Old Philpot and his son are still faithful representatives of the class to which they belong; and we cannot search far without finding Wingates, Dicks, and Quidnuncs. The character of Maria in *The Citizen*, affords a wide scope for the display of the lively powers of a vivacious spirit; and has, in consequence, been chosen by every eminent actress ambitious of excelling in sprightly comedy, from the time of its first representation to the present day. It introduced, at its production in 1761, a young lady to the stage, a Miss Elliott, whose talents seems to have been peculiarly

adapted to the part, and who subsequently pursued a short but brilliant career. *The Old Maid,* though more effective at the time than *The Citizen,* possesses little or no attractions for a modern audience; the peculiar kind of *equivoque* by which it is supported, having lost its relish, while it is deficient both in incident and interest.

Foote neglected to fulfil his part of the agreement, and Murphy was, at the commencement of the ensuing season, embroiled with Garrick; who, perhaps, had some reason to be displeased by the production of three very effective pieces, under a different management, which must have lost a portion of their novelty before the theatre came into his hands again. This misunderstanding being made up, harmony was established for a time, between two persons who could not agree very long together. The departure of Garrick for the Continent, and the legal avocations of Murphy, who was now called to the bar, occasioned the latter to pause in his dramatic career; and it was not until the January of 1764, that he produced any thing new. *No One's Enemy but His Own,* and *What we Must all Come to,* each being comedies in two acts, came out on the same night at Covent-garden; a perilous experiment, which, though formerly brilliantly successful, could not be hazarded again with impunity.

The author had, by his political writings, incensed the party opposed to his views; and though he did not introduce any allusions to the passing public events in his dramatic writings, his enemies eagerly availed themselves of some weak points in a character which required all the indulgence of a very favourable audience, to condemn both pieces. *No One's Enemy but His Own,* banished the stage on the first night of its representation, has never appeared again; but the *What we Must all Come to,* which was scarcely permitted a hearing, has been revived, most successfully, under the name of *Three Weeks after Marriage;* and still continues to be very attractive. Added to the humour of the broadest farce,

this lively production affords scenes of the purest and most elegant comedy ; nothing can be more ridiculously laughable than the quarrels between sir Charles and lady Racket, while both their characters, to be really effective, must be placed in the hands of performers distinguished for their taste and refinement. The ill success attendant upon these dramas led to circumstances which occasioned another misunderstanding between Garrick and Murphy. The latter, with a view of bringing out his fair *protégé*, Miss Elliott,—the young actress before mentioned,—in a character peculiarly adapted for the display of her lively talents, had written a comedy, called *The School for Guardians*, upon the model of Wycherley's *Country Wife*. It not being thought advisable to risk the trial of a new play immediately upon the late defeat, this comedy was laid aside for some time, its representation being confined to private rehearsals at the house of the author. When offered at length to his friend Garrick, Murphy was surprised to find that he was likely to be forestalled by an altered version of Wycherley's play, under the name of *The Country Girl*, then in preparation for the stage. Impressed with an idea that he had been unhandsomely used in this affair, Murphy remonstrated very warmly upon the subject, and equal indignation being shown on the other side, a breach ensued, which was only made up by the intervention of anxious friends. *The School for Guardians* was subsequently acted at Covent-garden, where it met with very doubtful success, languishing throughout six nights, and then being withdrawn for ever. It is impossible to say whether Garrick was indebted for a hint in the revival of *The Country Wife*, from the rumours afloat respecting *The School for Guardians;* but there can be no doubt that the production of the latter was quite unworthy of Murphy's genius.

The three succeeding dramas, from the same prolific pen, were tragedies, *Zenobia*, *Alzuma*, and *The Grecian Daughter*. The first, though not formed of those imperishable materials which ensure lasting success, took

the town by the grandeur of its subject, and the excellence displayed by the lady, Mrs. Barry, to whom the character of the heroine was entrusted. *Alzuma*, confirming the opinion previously formed of it by Garrick, who returned it very unceremoniously to its author, lingered for nine nights at Covent-garden, and then expired; but *The Grecian Daughter* afforded to its author a triumph, which has rarely been surpassed. The heroine of this successful tragedy has always proved a favourite with actresses of the highest genius; and if *The Grecian Daughter* no longer appeals to the sympathies of an audience, it is because the stage does not possesses a single female performer sufficiently attractive to draw a house. Yet with all our admiration of Murphy's dramatic works, and all our desire to offer the highest tribute which his genius demands, it seems only to have been the absence of better things, which occasioned the extraordinary success of a tragedy, founded upon a very disagreeable subject. There is nothing in *The Grecian Daughter* which fastens on the heart; nor does any passage in the poetry live upon the memory; it has, however, always been effective on the stage, and affords many opportunities for the display of the highest description of tragic talent.

The long delay which some curious circumstances occasioned in the representation of Murphy's succeeding drama, the comedy of *Know your own Mind*, proved very inimical to the ultimate success of this play. Originally written for the purpose of affording an appropriate character for Miss Elliott; upon the death of this lady, the author showed two or three of the scenes to Mrs. Abingdon; but, subsequently, being much delighted by Mrs. Barry's performance in elegant comedy, he manifested a desire that she should appear in the character of Lady Bell: Mrs. Abingdon claimed the part; endeavouring to establish the fact of a promise from the author, that she should become the purchaser of the play, in consequence of some real or supposed danger that the hostility provoked by his political writings

would burst forth on the night of its representation. An angry correspondence succeeded; and Murphy, who seems to have placed very little dependence upon the friendship of Garrick, displeased with the part which he took upon this occasion, withdrew his play from the theatre. The great autocrat of Drury-lane does not appear to have treated so sterling an author as Murphy with the consideration which he merited. No man, at the time, had written so much, and so well; nor, excepting in one brilliant instance, *The School for Scandal*, was he ever surpassed: the comedies of his distinguished contemporary, the elder Colman, excellent as they undoubtedly are, not ranking higher than *The Way to keep Him;* while two only, *The Clandestine Marriage*, and *The Jealous Wife*, will bear a comparison with the list from Murphy's pen, which still keeps the stage. Murphy complains that, after the performance of *Zenobia*, in 1768, no other work of his appeared until the representation of *The Grecian Daughter*, in 1772; though Mr. Garrick could in the mean time act four pieces, by another author, in the course of twelve months. But, while thoroughly disgusted with the conduct of the manager, Murphy could do justice to the merits of the actor; and in an introductory piece, written for the opening of Covent-garden theatre, in 1776, entitled *News from Parnassus*, he paid a just and acceptable compliment to the Roscius of the age, who had lately retired from public life. The lapse of two years having mitigated the resentment of both parties, Garrick, upon receiving this public tribute of admiration and regard from an estranged and valued friend, immediately made overtures for a reconciliation—and they met in kindness. The comedy of *Know Your own Mind* was now revived again; and a friendly conversation took place between its author and Garrick, who furnished the epilogue. It was a curious coincidence, and one which Murphy loved to dwell upon, that his first and last dramatic work should have been indebted, for the introduction of the one and the finale of the other, to

the pen of Garrick, who wrote the prologue for *The Apprentice*, and the epilogue for *Know your own Mind.* Written in 1764: this comedy did not appear until 1773. During the interval which elapsed it sustained many alterations and revisals; and when at length it was produced upon the stage, its great and acknowledged merits were eclipsed by those of a rival production, *The School for Scandal*, throwing its less brilliant contemporary completely in the shade. The extraordinary resemblance between several of the characters in these comedies seems too strong to have been produced by accident. The exposure of hypocrisy, and the almost universal love of detraction, are the subjects of both; and, as Sheridan's intimacy with the manager of Covent-garden, and the friendly assistance afforded to each other, which effectually destroyed all competition between them, gave great facilities for the study of the MS. plays in rehearsal at the time, there is a probability that the author of *The School for Scandal* profited by the hints afforded by *Know your own Mind.* The incomparable superiority of Sheridan's admirable production has prevented that of Murphy from receiving the justice due to its merits: it is impossible to avoid drawing comparisons unfavourable to the latter; which, notwithstanding the wit of its dialogue, and the spirit of its principal characters, flags in the absence of those striking incidents which combine to render *The School for Scandal* the most popular comedy ever produced upon the modern stage.

The success of *Know your own Mind*, though rendered less brilliant and lasting by the influence of a more distinguished rival, was still great and decided. The character of Dashwould, which was generally believed to have been intended for Foote, is drawn with infinite skill, while those of Millamour, and lady Bell, will always meet with favour. In themselves not equal to Dashwould, — which is perhaps the very best delineations of a class, forming at once the pets and pests of society, — they are exceedingly effective on the stage; and while it possessed actors equal to the representation

of the more refined species of comedy, these capricious lovers frequently appeared before an audience. A considerable period has elapsed since the last appearance of *Know your own Mind,* in London; but it will always be a favourite in the closet, its excellencies being, in a great degree, independent of scenic assistance. At a subsequent period, Murphy wrote two other plays, tragedies, — *The Rival Sisters,* and *Armenius,* — apparently with an intention of bringing them out upon the stage: if offered, however, they were not accepted at either house, but are included in the number of the author's printed works.

No man ever did more for the cause of morality, in composing for the theatre, than the writer now under review; there is not a single passage in any one of his plays that can justly give offence to the most fastidious reader; his wit is of a chaste and refined description, and he delighted in displaying the female character in its most charming point of view. During his public career he had to contend against prejudices occasioned by the strong part which he took in politics, and against the attacks of hosts of newspaper writers, who envied him his talents, and hated him for his success; but though he did not disdain to defend himself when thus assailed, the hostilities which ensued led to nothing more than a petty kind of warfare, not worthy of a chronicle. Churchill was, in fact, the only adversary whose censures could prove injurious to Murphy's reputation; his satires will be read long after the ephemeral attempts of contemporaries — equally censorious, but far inferior in talent, — have been thrown aside and forgotten. Murphy thought himself called upon at the time to notice the attacks of this merciless tyrant; he tells us, that not to feel just resentment had been stupidity, and not to reply, downright cowardice: but there can be no good end answered by the revival of contests to which all literary men are subject; posterity having settled every question relative to Murphy's merits as an author.

The dramatic compositions included in the printed collection of Murphy's works, are twenty-three in number; three MS. plays were purchased at the sale of his effects in 1805, and an exceedingly happy exposure of Garrick's managerial delinquencies, is printed in the quarto edition of the author's life by Jesse Foot. Murphy's veneration for Shakspeare rendered him highly indignant at the profane manner in which his plays were treated by the presumptuous hands which adapted them for representation. Garrick had frequently offended in this way, mutilating and altering at various times, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Catherine and Petruchio*, and *Cymbeline*. Upon his return from Paris in 1771, having imbibed some of the French notions respecting the decorums proper to be observed in tragedy, he omitted the grave-diggers in the representation of *Hamlet*. This piece of impertinence, together with several petty stratagems which the manager did not disdain to practise, in order to court the favour of his titled acquaintance, and to promote his own interests at the expense of others, provoked Murphy to employ his pen in a *jeu d'esprit*, in three acts, which he entitled *Hamlet, with Alterations*. This very felicitous production, though a close parody of Shakspeare's play, vindicates the injured fame of our noblest bard, the whole ridicule resting upon the devoted heads of those who presumed to overlay his gold with their tinsel. The ghost of Shakspeare appears in the dead of night to the assistant manager, — that is, George Garrick; and the bookseller of Drury-lane, the prompter and property-men filling the parts of Francisco and Bernardo.

They recite what they have witnessed to Garrick, who confronts the troubled spirit, and receives a just rebuke; the great merit of the whole being the adaptation of Shakspeare's thoughts and expressions to the peculiar state of Drury-lane, under the Garrick dynasty. Murphy showed this ingenious satire to a few of his particular friends; and a rumour of its existence

got abroad, to the dismay of the persons who figured in the principal characters: its author was not, however, tempted to give it publicity; and it did not appear in print until after the grave had closed on all the parties concerned. It seems rather surprising that so clever a production should have been overlooked by the numerous collectors of facetiæ of every kind, and that it should be left to reward the researches of those who toil through the ponderous volume which alone contains it.

Though entitled to take a very respectable rank as a lawyer, Murphy did not rise to great distinction in his profession, or realise a fortune in the pursuit. When he quitted the bar, he was still in a great measure dependent upon literature for his support; and, finding himself unable to maintain an establishment at Hammersmith, he engaged apartments at Brompton, where he principally resided during the remainder of his life. Descending into the vale of existence — under melancholy circumstances — his hopes of attaining legal honours, defeated by a series of disappointments, which at length induced him to retire in disgust from the profession he had chosen. Outliving all his theatrical interests, and his health failing, Murphy was rescued from the grasp of poverty by the opportune appointment of commissioner of bankrupts. From this period, he had no pecuniary difficulties to contend against; a *Life of Garrick* brought him a considerable sum; he came into the possession of a legacy of 1000*l.*, and seems to have been indebted to a kind relative for an annual donation. Late in life he was gratified by being called, by the Society of Lincoln's-Inn, to a seat as a bencher; and in March 1803, the literary celebrity so justly gained, obtained for him, without any private interest or personal solicitation, a pension from the crown. Mr. Addington has the credit of bestowing this mark of royal favour, which was as unexpected as it was welcome, to a man who left his merits to speak for themselves, and dignified his obscurity by silent

resignation to an adverse fate. The grant of 200*l.* a year for life, was accompanied by a very handsome testimony to the "sound principles and unquestioned character," which were additional recommendations to the favour of the monarch by whom it was conferred. Murphy did not enjoy the royal bounty long, dying in the June of 1805; he was buried, at his own request, in the same vault with his mother, in Hammersmith church. Though apparently formed to captivate the sex, having every advantage which a fine face, a tall and graceful person, and dignified gentlemanly manners could give, Arthur Murphy was never induced to enter the married state. Politely declining a romantic proposal made to him in early life, by the brother of a lady he had never seen, there is no record of any second negotiation. With some faults of temper, which probably proved the source of all his disappointments, he seems to have possessed a warm affectionate heart and a generous unselfish spirit. His attachments were cordial and steady, and totally free from every sordid consideration respecting money; his liberality did not render him unjust: he died poor, but devoid of debt; and, though he might have repented many acts of imprudence, there was no transaction of his life of which he had cause to be ashamed. Nor was the lustre of Murphy's talents obscured by folly of any kind; he put forth no absurd pretensions—displayed no overweening vanity; securing in society the respect of his associates, and making a distinguished figure without any vulgar ambition to shine.

RICHARD CUMBERLAND.

(1732—1811.)

The descendant of a highly respectable family, distinguished in the world of letters, the names of Richard Bentley and of bishop Cumberland being associated with philosophical works of acknowledged importance, the subject of the present memoir may lay claim to hereditary talent. Richard Cumberland, the great grandson of the learned bishop of Peterborough, and the son of Dr. Denison Cumberland, afterwards bishop of Kilmore in Ireland, by Joanna, youngest daughter of Dr. Bentley, was born on the nineteenth of February, 1732, in the Masters' Lodge of Trinity College, Cambridge. Remaining under the paternal roof until he was six years old, he might, even at this early period of life, have derived great advantage from the conversation and instruction of his parents; his mother being a woman of very superior attainments, and celebrated as the Phœbe of the popular pastoral by Dr. Byrom, printed in No. 603. of the Spectator. Cumberland did not, however, display any precocity of talent; though of an inquiring mind, he possessed no inherent love of learning; and when, at six years old, he was sent to a school of considerable reputation at Bury St. Edmonds, he did not, for some time, afford much promise of rewarding the pains bestowed upon his education. It was only by arousing a feeling of shame at the degeneracy which he manifested, that he could be induced to apply to his studies; being, in fact, incorrigibly idle, until a judicious reproof from his master awakened a spirit of emulation, which never afterwards slumbered. By diligence and attention he succeeded

in gaining the highest place in the school; maintaining his ground, although he had to contend against two very able competitors, the Warrens; one being afterwards an eminent physician, while the other subsequently obtained a mitre.

During these juvenile school days, Cumberland made an attempt at poetical composition: he does not appear, however, to have been injured by injudicious praise; for, although his father endeavoured to defend the puerile verses, the nicer discrimination of a female critic exposed them to just ridicule. The intervals passed at home were spent in the pursuit of elegant knowledge, under the direction of Mrs. Cumberland, whose taste led her to select Shakspeare as the author chiefly to be consulted, and whose just appreciation of every beauty of our divine bard rendered her an invaluable guide. Cumberland himself dwells with great complacency upon the early efforts of his muse, produced by a course of study so stimulating to literary ambition; but the fragments which he has preserved afford little indication of the talents which he undoubtedly possessed, though probably at no time justifying the reputation which it was his good fortune to obtain. The reading of Shakspeare, rather than any natural predisposition towards dramatic writing, appears to have influenced our young author in giving his verses a dramatic form, since it was not until after the lapse of a very considerable period, that he renewed his attempt at this mode of composition. Cumberland had resided for some time in the great world of London; had frequented theatres; and became acquainted with the various channels to literary celebrity, before he turned his thoughts towards the stage.

From Bury, Cumberland was removed to Westminster school, where, amidst other distinguished contemporaries, he found the elder Colman. Boarding, during the latter period of his residence, at the house of a private gentleman, he enjoyed occasional opportunities of visiting the theatre, and witnessed the early

struggles of Garrick against the dull formality of the old school of acting. His description of the contrast between the lively, natural, unpremeditated manner of the young aspirant, and the stately passionless declamation of Quin and Ryan, conveys an admirable idea of the difference of style, and the impression made upon every spectator not entirely devoted to the bigotry and prejudice of a by-gone age. While domesticated under the roof of Mr. Ashby, whose mansion seems to have been the abode of dullness, destitute of books, of visitors, and of all intellectual amusement, a scene, in fact, which it is difficult to imagine under the existing state of things in London, the young student had nothing to divert his mind from the pursuit of learning. Accordingly, his thoughts taking their natural direction, he devoted himself to the classics, and exercised his talents by a translation of a passage in Virgil's *Georgics*, selecting for his subject the splendid description of the plague amongst the cattle. Cumberland at a later period of life proved a very indifferent poet; but these verses, though destitute of other merit, show a considerable degree of learning, together with great facility in the art of composition. The death of an elder sister, a young lady who is described as possessing a more than ordinary share of beauty and accomplishments, and who fell a victim to the small-pox, occasioned his removal from Westminster. The grief, which he shared with his parents upon this melancholy event, could only be dissipated by change of scene, and after a short residence at home, he, in his fourteenth year, was entered as a student of Trinity College, Cambridge. Cumberland pursued his academical career with honour and advantage to himself: exceedingly industrious, and addicted to no vice, he followed with great diligence a course of study which, had he not been induced to enter a new path, would, in all probability, have led to the best rewards which the university could bestow. Originally intended for the church, his studies, which were however of a very miscellaneous description, were chiefly

directed to the furtherance of this view. Though accumulating much of what may be termed the rubbish of learning, aimless and purposeless information involving the mind in endless intricacies, and leading to nothing at last, he showed a disposition for the acquisition of knowledge which, under more skilful guidance, might have been turned to better account. The taste for literary composition grew upon him, but his judgment being very immature, he wasted his time and thoughts in collecting materials which proved of no sort of use, and contemplating the production of a Universal History, was obliged to relinquish the project in despair. At this period Cumberland certainly did not display a single symptom of original genius; all his compositions were formed upon the models of others; at one time being smitten with a desire to imitate Spenser, and at another following the footsteps of Mason. Though not appearing to contemplate the pursuit of success upon the stage, the first finished production of any importance emanating from his pen was a drama suggested by Mason's *Elfrida*, taken from a subject which afterwards occupied the attention of the latter named author, who, in publishing his version of *Caractacus*, effectually prevented the appearance of Cumberland's attempt at the revival of the Greek tragedy.

A contested election for the county of Northampton, the place in which the family resided, gave an opportunity to the elder Cumberland to display his zeal and activity in the cause of the whigs. The candidate thus supported was unsuccessful, but the earl of Halifax, at that time holding office under government, and being lord-lieutenant of the county, feeling anxious to evince his gratitude for the assistance rendered to the cause, after several overtures to the father, which were declined, offered to make the son his private secretary. The diplomatic line was deemed too promising to be rashly relinquished; and without considering whether the young man was qualified to tread a path of so much difficulty and delicacy, the offer was accepted, and the destiny of

the collegian completely changed. After a short residence at York, for the purpose of affording relaxation to the mind from severer studies, and to give a younger sister an opportunity of improving herself in the fashionable accomplishments of the day, Richard, having already taken his degree of bachelor of arts, prepared to résume his pursuit of academic honours. These views were interrupted by a summons to London, to which the studious youth was called, in order to fulfil the duties of his new appointment. Upon his arrival he was settled in lodgings in Downing-street, and put into direct communication with Mr. George Pownall, then acting secretary to the board of trade, and from whom he was expected to acquire the practical information which would enable him to enter public life with credit to himself and advantage to his employers. It has been already stated that Richard Cumberland was totally free from vice, and probably, had he been left to the quiet seclusion of a college, he would have gone through life without suffering from that irritability which marred his own prospects, and provoked the hostilities of others.

Evidently deficient in temper, tact, or the power of accommodating himself to the wishes of his associates, and lamentably destitute of a knowledge of the world, he made no friends in his new situation. The course of his studies thus suddenly and entirely changed, and accustomed to seek in books what could now only be found in the intercourse with mankind, he was disappointed and perplexed. He found the information extant regarding the colonies, though more than sufficiently voluminous, to be of a very meagre description; and he speedily imbibed an opinion very injurious to his future prospects, that he had mastered every thing in his peculiar department worth knowing. He did not conciliate the persons with whom he was now to act; and probably a little vain of his classical learning, showed a much stronger desire to succeed in the approaching election at Trinity College for a lay fellowship, than to secure the confidence of the people about him. Going through a severe examination with great

credit, he obtained his object; and, after a short residence at home, plunged again into the official duties of his situation. Still trifling with the pen, he produced, as a relaxation from the less agreeable duties of his office, a poem, entitled *An Elegy on St. Mark's Eve,* intended to illustrate the popular superstitions connected with a night which rural tradition has invested with many terrors; following, but at an immeasurable distance, the steps of Gray, in choosing a churchyard for the scene of action. In skilful hands the subject might have been rendered interesting, but the poem seems to have been destitute of merit, falling still-born from the press, and proving a profitless speculation to Dodsley, the publisher. While dislike to his employment, and indifference to the means which might have advanced him in the path chalked out for his pursuit, prevented young Cumberland from deriving much advantage from his position, the elegance of his tastes and the ready application of a large stock of miscellaneous information to the topics discussed in society, attracted the notice of the visitors at Halifax House, and amongst them that of the celebrated George Townshend. He was likewise distinguished by the attentions of the equally famous Bubb Doddington, who lived in great splendour at a villa in the neighbourhood of London, where he was in the habit of entertaining the wits and oddities of the day.

Hitherto Cumberland's literary tastes had only been manifested by occasional lucubrations, a translation from a classic author, or fragments of works contemplated, but thrown aside. A perusal, however, of Middleton's account of the life of Cicero led to the construction of a drama upon the subject, choosing the banishment of his hero as the chief incident. Undertaking it at first merely as an agreeable employment of learned leisure, when completed, the growing affection of the author, and the favourable opinion of his friends, induced him to make an attempt to bring it out upon the stage. Lord Halifax approved of the dramatic essay of his accomplished secretary; and Warburton wrote a flattering

letter upon the subject, pronouncing the work to be much too good for a degenerate stage, the usual apology for the rejection of dullness. Thus encouraged, and having the opportunity of an introduction to Garrick, the play was offered in the presence of its author, by lord Halifax, to the manager of Drury-lane. The very title was sufficient to prejudice a man so well acquainted with the direction of the public taste against so unpromising a work. Garrick, accordingly, though exceedingly courteous, held out no reasonable hope of success; and the young dramatist was not surprised to learn that the play, "though very meritorious," would not suit the interests of the theatre.

Lord Halifax, displeased and disappointed at the rejection of a work which he had approved and patronized, displayed his resentment by relinquishing, for a considerable period, the acquaintance of the Roscius of the day; but Cumberland assures us, that he himself was convinced of the justness of the sentence. Shortly afterwards, having obtained the appointment of crown agent for the province of Nova Scotia, through the influence of Lord Halifax, the young secretary, then only twenty-two years old, made proposals of marriage to the daughter of an intimate friend of his family, and his union with this lady took place in the February of 1759.

The death of George II., 1760, occasioned a change in the administration. The earl of Halifax was appointed to the viceroyship of Ireland, whither he was accompanied by his secretary, the elder Cumberland going out as one of the chaplains. The regulation of the lord-lieutenant's household, and other duties connected with his station, suspended for a time all literary avocations. Cumberland probably might have profited by many opportunities of improving his fortune while holding so confidential a situation about the court; a rigid notion of integrity, which cannot be too highly commended, prevented him from taking advantage of these circumstances, and when, at the departure

of lord Halifax from Ireland, he was offered a baronetcy as the reward of his services, he did not feel himself in a condition to support the title. An accomplished diplomatist, however disappointed in the substitution of an empty honour for solid advantage, would not, by declining a recompense which he considered inadequate or unappropriate, have run the risk of displeasing the donor. Cumberland subsequently might have made interest for some lucrative appointment on the plea of the necessity of maintaining the rank thus thrust upon him ; and, at any rate, the title of baronet would always be found advantageous to a man desirous of making a figure in public life

The dependent upon a great man had yet to learn that to slight a favour was to give offence ; lord Halifax raised the father to a bishopric, but showed no further disposition to advance the fortunes of the son. The promotion to the see of Clonfert was followed by a translation to that of Kilmore ; meanwhile Richard Cumberland could not even maintain himself in the position that he had gained. On the appointment of the earl of Halifax to be secretary of state, he expected to receive the reward which ten years of unremitting service seemed to merit ; he had shown himself, however, destitute of the ambition which leads men to eminence, and lord Halifax, in passing him over, and nominating another person to the office of under-secretary, seems to have been aware that his unambitious protégé would content himself with an inferior situation. Though mortified and disappointed at the result of his application, which was dismissed with an intimation that he was not qualified for every situation, Cumberland did not evince the honourable indignation which this treatment would have called forth in a man of high spirit conscious of desert. He relinquished the patronage of lord Halifax, and condescended to solicit the employment vacant by the promotion of his rival, a circumstance which excited the surprise of the minister, who, having remonstrated against so undignified a proceeding, dismissed him

without deigning to offer any advice upon the subject. From this period the intercourse between lord Halifax and his ex-secretary ceased. Cumberland obtained the appointment which he sought; and being relieved from duties which he had always found irksome, abandoned himself to more congenial pursuits. In the attempt to write for the stage he readily confesses, that the success of Bickerstaff, who had brought out two operas, *Love in a Village* and *The Maid of the Mill,* with great applause, induced him to produce something of the kind. Several friends directed his attention to the music of some old English ballads, and having interwoven the adaptation of these airs into a drama of three acts, entitled *The Summer's Tale,* after it had been furnished with an overture by Abel, and supported by some original compositions by Bach, Arne, and Arnold, it was presented to Covent Garden, and performed with moderate success. Though the partiality of the author induced him to attempt a revival of *The Summer's Tale* in a new dress, under the name of *Amelia,* it was speedily consigned to the tomb of the Capulets, and is now out of print and forgotten. The appearance, however, of a new candidate for public applause in the same line, raised the alarm of Bickerstaff, who, depending solely on the success of his musical dramas for subsistence, commenced a series of very unjustifiable hostilities against the author of a trifle whose insignificance ought to have proved its safeguard. Cumberland, more flattered than displeased by attacks which gave his literary efforts a degree of consequence they might not otherwise have attained, and which afforded him an opportunity of displaying the magnanimity of his spirit, and his disdain of pecuniary emolument, wrote to Bickerstaff in a kind but dignified manner. He assured the less happily circumstanced author, that he had no interested motives in giving his works to the public, and that he would not again create any uneasiness in his mind by the production of operas.

The representation of *The Summer's Tale* confirmed

the predilection already imbibed for dramatic writing; and, in renewing his acquaintance with one of the principal actors, Mr. Smith, whom he had known at the university, Cumberland was encouraged to take a higher flight. Smith recommended his old acquaintance to direct his talents to the production of a regular drama, and this flattering suggestion was received with all the attention which it merited. During the summer recess, which he passed in Ireland, he produced a comedy in five acts, entitled *The Brothers.* This play was offerred to Mr. Harris, one of the managers of Covent Garden, who brought it out against the opinion of his brother proprietors. The success proved commensurate with the desert; with little that was novel or striking in the plot or characters, there was nothing to offend, and the whole gave promise of better things to come. A few flattering lines in the epilogue addressed to Garrick, who happened to be in the house at the first night of representation, were received very graciously. Garrick, who did not expect a compliment from the author of *The Banishment of Cicero,* was pleased and surprised by a tribute to his genius from so unlooked for a quarter, and immediately made overtures for an acquaintance which he had hitherto tacitly declined. There can be no doubt that the admiration of Cumberland of the "immortal actor" was sincere, but it must be confessed that the compliment was well timed, and showed that its author had now become acquainted with the best method of securing influential friends. The prologue was less happy, creating many enemies by its flippant strictures upon other writers, and the loftiness of the pretensions put forth on account of the production which it ushered into notice. The severe remarks which these unlucky verses elicited, taught their author a very useful lesson; and, though not less vain of his future productions, he took care not to provoke the hostility of the press by vaunting his own merits at the expense of his competitors.

The reception of *The Brothers* satisfied the author.

and it kept possession of the stage long enough to remunerate the managers, and to take a respectable place amongst the stock plays of several ensuing seasons. In the following year another visit to Ireland afforded abundant leisure for literary avocations, and, shutting himself up in an empty room, which looked upon a turf stack, Cumberland sat down seriously to the composition of *The West Indian*. The sentimental school of writing may be said to have commenced with Cibber, who however contrived to throw so much life and spirit into his dialogues and to draw his characters so skilfully, that the absence of a complicated plot and striking incident is scarcely felt. Though Cumberland could not maintain the ground which he first took up, a few of his numerous productions afford specimens of liveliness and elegance which deservedly rank him very high. In aiming at legitimate comedy he did not fall very wide of the mark; and, looking into society for his models, he endeavoured to excite interest by the selection of characters previously given up to almost general reprehension, which he justly, as well as generously, represented in an amiable point of view. In *The West Indian* he introduced two of these outcasts, the victims, as he styles them, of national, professional, and religious prejudice; his Creole and his Irishman being intended to remove the somewhat contemptuous opinion commonly entertained towards characters which had usually been placed before the audience in an odious light, the villains or the buffoons of the piece. In the warm-hearted, generous, vivacious hero, wilful, but not persevering in error, the author was particularly happy; his Major O'Flaherty was much less successful, and cannot now be recognised as the gentlemanlike Hibernian it was intended to represent. Notwithstanding the advantage of frequent visits to the country, Cumberland does not appear to have understood the Irish character, and has depicted a vulgar, coarse-minded mercenary, instead of the high-spirited gentleman, compelled, by the intolerance of the government, to draw his sword for a foreign prince.

The nice discrimination which could have detected these errors did not belong to the audience of the time; and, with the exception of lord Lyttleton, who protested against the principal means by which the catastrophe of the play is brought about, the approbation was unanimous. On the completion of the manuscript it was submitted to Garrick, who, seeing great merit in the play, suggested some alterations, and assisted in the revisal of the whole. Not anticipating the extraordinary success which awaited this fortunate production, Cumberland offered to relinquish its profits in exchange for a picture in the possession of Garrick, a copy of a Holy Family from Andrea del Sarto. Garrick happened, fortunately, to place a particular value upon this picture as the gift of lord Baltimore, and the bargain was not concluded.

Public attention at that period, always excited by the production of a new play by an author of any note, was more than usually directed towards a comedy, which the title gave reason to suppose contained something offensive. The West Indians, a sensitive race, mustered very strong, in consequence of a rumour which had got abroad, that the hero was to be held up to public scorn as the object of malignant satire. Garrick, who sat with Mr. and Mrs. Cumberland in the managerial private box, was alarmed by the hostile appearance of the pit, and communicated his fears to the less anxious author, who, confident of good intentions, believed that the first words of the play would disarm resentment. The opening lines of the prologue were inaudible, in consequence of the tumult that prevailed, but silence at length being obtained, the speaker was directed to recommence, and when, in developing the character of the principal personage, he stated that it would exhibit

"Some emanations of a noble mind,"

the fierceness of the anger subsided, and a sullen calm succeeded, broken however by loud plaudits from the gallery, at an unexpected compliment paid to the Irish nation, which had hitherto been treated very severely

by dramatic writers. The opening scenes restored the whole of the audience to good humour, and the play went swimmingly on to the end, its general good feeling, and the dash and gaiety of its warm-hearted, impetuous hero, proving irresistible. Mrs. Abingdon made some merit of stooping to the character of Charlotte Rusport, which she thought a mere sketch beneath her dignity; such as it was, she made the most of it, contributing by her admirable acting to the triumphs of the night.

It has been justly remarked, that the extraordinary popularity of *The West Indian* has proved detrimental to its permanent success, literally worn out by repeated representations, the theatrical world becoming at length weary of its very name; this comedy long before the change in public opinion, which has reduced the number of standard plays to the present small amount, had satiated the town, and was thrown aside, never to be revived again. Its author, however, enjoyed all the advantages which its brilliant reception produced. The treasurer of the theatre, charmed by the amount of the receipts made an ostentatious display of the profits of the author's nights, which he brought, all in gold, to Cumberland's house, in Queen Anne's-street, spreading the guineas on the table, and contemplating them with the delighted gaze of a man unaccustomed to such noble disbursements, and conscious that, though much was paid to the writer of the play, much remained behind.

Established in society as an author of acknowledged merit, and living in ease and affluence in the most fashionable part of London, Cumberland was courted and caressed as the lion of the day. He entertained the best company at his own house, was admitted to all the distinguished coteries about town, receiving compliments at Mrs. Montague's, and discussing the merits of his play with noblemen in the park. Courted and caressed by men of the highest reputation, Burke, Reynolds, Johnson, Goldsmith, Foote, and Jenyns, in addition to Garrick, with whom he had lived for some time on terms of friendly intimacy, he enjoyed all the

triumphs attendant upon celebrity. Tenacious alike of his own literary fame and that of his family connections, Cumberland took up the pen in great indignation against bishop Louth, who, in an attack upon Warburton, had censured his maternal grandfather, Dr. Richard Bentley; the long and angry pamphlet which he published upon this occasion met with no reply, Louth not choosing to enter into a controversy upon the subject. Cumberland, in yielding to resentful feelings upon so slight a cause, since every person who gives his writings to the public is fairly obnoxious to criticism, shows how easily he could be irritated by the strictures which his own voluminous works, of very different degrees of merit, were calculated to provoke. His assurance that he bore the observations of hostile writers with perfect equanimity, must be insufficient to produce conviction when opposed to the extreme sensitiveness betrayed upon trifling occasions, a sensitiveness which seems to justify the imputations of his associates, who represent him as writhing under the slightest infliction of the critic's lash.

Cumberland might have derived very solid and material advantage from the honours bestowed upon the author of *The West Indian*, for while his laurels were fresh and flourishing, he received a visit from a distant relation, who expressed a determination to make a deed of settlement which would secure to him a large inheritance at the death of the testator. Cumberland objecting, from motives of delicacy, to a disposition of property which the donor might afterwards have occasion to regret, insisted that a clause should be inserted in the deed which permitted its revocation; and his relative living long enough to be persuaded to alter his original intention, a disappointment, the more mortifying from being wholly unexpected, ensued. The success of *The West Indian* naturally produced a new effort; this comedy had, in the first instance, run twenty-eight nights, and had established the merits of Moody, who performed the character of Major O'Flaherty, as an actor. In his

ensuing work, *The Fashionable Lover*, Cumberland resorted to the expedient which had answered so well, and selected a North Briton for the object of his Quixotic benevolence; the existing Scotchmen of the stage having been consigned to all the odium which wit and malice could excite. The suggestion was not, however, his own; and, conscious of his inability to pourtray the national characteristics of a country with which he was wholly unacquainted, he hesitated at first, but being easily persuaded that he could get over the difficulties, he produced the counterfeit Highlander, who now would scarcely be tolerated on any boards, the Waverley novels enabling every spectator to discover the cockney beneath the kilt. Though not equal in merit to its predecessor, or so successful on its first representation, *The Fashionable Lover* ran a triumphant course, and it was thought, by the favouritism of Garrick, to have kept the stage longer than its attractions justified. Deficient in the vigour and spirit which rendered *The West Indian* so justly popular, it degenerated into a sickly kind of sentimentality, and possessed nothing that could insure the lasting favour of the public.

The death of both his parents, a severe blow to a man who certainly, whatever his faults might be, shone in the domestic character, suspended the literary labours of Cumberland for a time; but, returning to his wonted tasks again in 1775, nearly three years after the production of *The Fashionable Lover*, he brought out another comedy, entitled *The Choleric Man*. To enter into any thing approaching to a critical disquisition upon Cumberland's almost interminable list of dramas, would prove an irksome task, both to the writer and the reader: though sufficiently amusing in the perusal to repay the time bestowed upon it. *The Choleric Man* could never be very effective on the stage. The low comedy characters are coarse and devoid of humour, and the contrast between the brothers, forced and unnatural. It originally appeared accompanied by a dedication to Detraction, in which the author, while pro-

fessing perfect indifference to the censures of the press, shows that he was deeply wounded by the disparaging observations emanating from the most contemptible of his critics. Two odes followed of a very mediocre description; and, in 1777, he employed himself in a work of perfect supererogation, the alteration of Shakspeare's Timon of Athens. The attempt of course proved a failure; and, though brought out upon the stage with all the support which the acting of Mr. and Mrs. Barry could afford, it languished for a few nights and was forgotten, the superior writers of the day scarcely deigning to notice a production, which they considered to be beneath the dignity of criticism. A not very successful afterpiece followed, entitled *The Note of Hand, or a Trip to Newmarket*, the only thing worthy of record concerning it being the supposition that a satirical attack which it contained upon the leaders of the party espoused by Sheridan, provoked the hostility of that witty rival. The character of Sir Fretful Plagiary is generally believed to have been intended for Cumberland; but the precise cause which produced Sheridan's satirical portrait remains a subject of dispute. The current story represents the author of *The West Indian* in a very contemptible light.

It is said that, at the representation of *The School for Scandal*, he never relaxed a feature, remaining inflexibly grave during those lively sallies which convulsed the house with laughter; and, not content with this silent demonstration of his sentiments, observed to the people about him, that he was astonished that the audience should laugh at puerilities which could not make him smile. This unfortunate display of a passion which always excites ridicule, became the subject of conversation in the literary circles, and soon reaching Sheridan's ear, he replied, that there was some ingratitude in Cumberland's refusal to laugh at his comedy, since he had laughed at one of his tragedies from beginning to end. This version of the tale appeared in print, and Cumberland takes considerable pains to

prove its fallacy. It seems that he was at Bath during the first season in which *The School for Scandal* appeared, and that he had not at that time produced a tragedy; but those who are of opinion that Cumberland really merited the character afterwards fastened upon him, get over this difficulty by supposing the remark to have been made at a later period, and subsequent to the production of *The Battle of Hastings*. It is said, that the likeness between sir Fretful Plagiary and the person said to have sat for the portrait was so faithful, that one of Cumberland's sons, when present at the representation of *The Critic*, acknowledged the resemblance, and expressed his belief that it was intended for his father. If Cumberland, in a moment of anxiety and apprehension, caused by the brilliant reception of a drama which totally eclipsed his most successful effort, should have betrayed his feelings of envy and uneasiness, he afterwards made the *amende*. Throughout all his printed works, so far from attempting to detract from the merits of Sheridan, he speaks of his talents upon every occasion with the respect and admiration which they deserve; but this may only prove that, while vanity and irritability led him astray, he did not persist in going wrong.

Cumberland's literary reputation was not increased by the production of his first tragedy, *The Battle of Hastings*, which, according to the general opinion, owed its representation to the friendly interest of Garrick, who exerted himself to procure its acceptance. Destitute of poetical merit, and deficient in plot and character, it did no credit to any of the parties concerned in its production; and it is said, that Cumberland's vexation at its failure was stronger than his gratitude to its patron, who, resenting this real or fancied wrong, a coolness ensued between the late intimate associates. Cumberland and Garrick were not precisely the parties calculated to keep well together for any considerable length of time; both were probably too exacting, too full of themselves, and, it may

be added, too jealous of others to coalesce in their respective views. Cumberland had seen Henderson perform at Bath, and, struck with the excellence of his acting, felt very naturally desirous to see him transplanted to the London boards. He wrote to Garrick upon the subject, and considered the engagement concluded between them; but, in the interim, George Garrick had made his report, and Henderson's name was left out of the list of performers at the transfer of the management of Drury-lane. Cumberland endeavoured to exonerate his friend from the imputation of envy, but it was well known at the time, both to Henderson and all the intimate acquaintance of the parties concerned, that Garrick did not desire to see a successor in London, whose extraordinary talents were so well calculated to console the town for the loss of its favourite. Henderson, however, came to the metropolis, and Cumberland confesses that the praise bestowed upon his performance did not prove an agreeable topic to the British Roscius. The early death of Henderson, in the opinion of all who were acquainted with his various excellences as an actor, alone prevented him from leaving a name behind, equal in celebrity to that of his distinguished predecessor.

The death of lord Halifax, from whom Cumberland, notwithstanding the coolness which had subsisted between them, might have expected some renewal of the patronage formerly accorded, seemed to put an end to all further hopes from the government. His successor at the board of trade, lord George Germain, did not at first appear likely to take much interest in the fate and fortunes of our author, but an opportunity occurring, which enabled him to perform a very essential service, he most unexpectedly exerted himself in promoting Mr. Cumberland to the situation of under-secretary to the board of trade. Now the father of six children, four sons and two daughters, the latter starting into womanhood, the increase of salary came very opportunely. Placed in easy circumstances, enjoying the best society,

and employing his pen rather as the amusement of leisure hours than as a source of profit, this seems to have been one of the happiest periods of our author's life. During the summer recess of 1779 he produced the opera of *Calypso*, for the avowed purpose of bringing forward the musical compositions of a Mr. Butler, who had lately returned from Italy, but this joint attempt was not very successful. Of the originality or excellence of the music we have no method of judging, since it was never published; but the dialogue, a plagiary from beginning to end, showed that the range of Cumberland's talents was of a very limited description. The board of trade having been broken up at the dissolution of lord North's administration, the ex-secretary was unfortunately reduced to undertake a mission to Spain. In the course of the year 1780, Cumberland became acquainted with some circumstances relative to the secret history of the courts of France and Spain, which he communicated to the government, and was in consequence selected to fill a very undefined appointment, for the purpose of counteracting the designs thus discovered. Not destined to shine as a diplomatist, in the very outset of the affair Cumberland seems to have neglected a most important point, since he was subsequently unable to induce the ministry to recognise his claims to pecuniary remuneration for the service he attempted to perform. The negociation, whatever it might be, proved unsuccessful, the agent was recalled, burthened with all the expenses of a journey in which, in order to disguise the true object of his mission, he had been accompanied by his family. There can be no doubt that, however unadvisedly Cumberland might have acted in a transaction which required a far superior degree of shrewdness, skill, and tact, than he seems to have possessed, the refusal to remunerate him for the sums actually disbursed on the public account must ever remain a stigma on the existing administration. The abolition of the board of trade, and his dismissal upon a pension very inadequate to the support of his customary establishment, together

with the ruinous expenses of his late mission, obliged Cumberland, when every hope of procuring justice from lord North proved fruitless, to retire from London, and to seek a retreat better adapted to his altered circumstances, at Tunbridge Wells. He had lost one son, the second, who had entered the navy, and was killed in an action in America. His eldest daughter had married lord Edward Bentinck, brother to the duke of Portland; and the second, together with an infant sister, born in Spain, accompanied their father in his retirement. Of the three remaining sons, the eldest was an officer in the first regiment of guards, the second held a commission in the tenth foot, and the third had engaged in the naval service. Cumberland withdrew from public life with broken fortunes, and the utter destruction of every hope of ever recovering the position he had once occupied; yet, the consciousness of having performed his duty to the utmost of his ability, and of making a great sacrifice to an exalted idea of moral rectitude, enabled him to bear his reverses with an unyielding spirit. Although the magnificent offer made by the king of Spain to pay the expenses of the secret emissary of a hostile court, might have been accepted by a less scrupulous person, Cumberland refused the proffered bounty, and preferred honourable poverty to every advantage which could be purchased by foreign gold. Neither did he, while suffering from a great wrong, indulge in those querulous complaints which slighter grievances were apt to produce; and upon this trying occasion he certainly showed himself superior to every species of littleness. The elegant and accomplished mind of Cumberland derived very considerable advantage from his travels on the continent. To his love of art, the world is indebted for a descriptive catalogue of the paintings in the king of Spain's palaces, and for two volumes of anecdotes of eminent painters in Spain, which, though subjecting him to some very invidious attacks at the time, form a valuable addition to the history of art.

The next dramatic production, emanating from a

very fertile pen, a domestic tragedy, though not destined to take a place by its more distinguished predecessors, the *George Barnwell* of Lillo, and the *Gamester* of Moore, proved a very effective and successful performance. Tragedy had in the days of Cumberland degenerated into a series of cold and pompous orations. The dignified sorrows of kings and queens, or a dull and turgid version of a classic story, alone afforded subjects for an appeal to the stronger passions; and Cumberland, in this instance, showed a remarkable degree of good taste, in preferring the easy dialogue of common life, to the stilted blank verse which wearied the ear through five long acts of solemn woe. Cumberland informs us, that the favourite actor of the day, Henderson, suggested the character of *The Mysterious Husband*, being desirous to display his talents in the personification of audacious and hardened villainy. The excellence of his acting, combined with the interest of the scene, produced a strong effect upon the audience, but the play did not survive its first successful run, and has no chance of ever being revived. In his following work, a collection of essays, published under the title of the *Observer*, Cumberland, if not equalling the best models in that peculiar department of literature, proves a very entertaining companion. These papers, and the incidental narratives which they contain, more especially the story of *Nicolas Pedrosa*, afford reason to believe, that had Cumberland lived in the present age, and entered the lists in a field of fiction, which has for the last twenty years led to fortune and renown, he would have far excelled as a novel writer the reputation which he earned as a dramatist. It is true that he tried his talents in three works of the kind, and failed; but this arose from the limited extent of his creative powers. He formed himself upon the model of Fielding, taking up ground already occupied by a host of imitators; but had the field before him been widened by those able pioneers who have struck out right and left, entering fearlessly into realms

before untried, Cumberland, in all probability, instead of five acts of rather indifferent comedy, would have produced, in annual succession, three volumes of a much more striking description.

The tragedy of *The Carmelite*, produced in 1784, was written for the purpose of affording Mrs. Siddons, then in the full zenith of her glory, an opportunity of displaying her extraordinary powers in an original character. In the choice of his story Cumberland departed a second time, and very judiciously, from the prevailing choice of subjects, feebly rendered from Grecian and Roman story. A tragedy entitled *The Elder Brother*, placed in the hands of Mr. Harris, previous to the author's journey to Spain, was never acted; and the public have also been spared two others, which, if existing at all, are still in MS. *The Carmelite*, after a very brief career, was set aside and forgotten; but the prolific pen of its author produced a comedy, *The Natural Son*, in the same season, which, if not sufficiently exciting to satisfy the expectations of a modern audience, will always afford delight in the perusal; it is in fact a miniature novel, its best scenes possessing the peculiar kind of interest which is independent of the aid of acting. Another comedy, *The Impostors*, has no merit worthy of a record; and this was followed by a novel, entitled *Arundel*, which proved sufficiently popular to encourage its author to write a second, *Henry*, a work disfigured by all the faults, and possessed of none of the beauties of its predecessor. Amid the long list of plays which came out in succession, two only deserve any thing like honourable mention. *The Jew*, and *The Wheel of Fortune*, the first named, a dramatised version of a paper in the *Observer*, intended to rescue the Jews from the opprobrium vulgarly attached to the whole community, and performed with considerable applause at its first representation, kept the stage during many ensuing seasons. Cumberland has not given us a very elevated notion of his hero, but though pens of infinitely greater power

have taken up the cause of this persecuted race, the Jews still require a champion to assert their claim to dignity; and it is too much to expect them to be very grateful for the manner in which they have been vindicated, the amiable traits of character displayed, being mingled with meanness and absurdity. It was however expected, that the tribe would evince their sense of Cumberland's services by some substantial token, but his exertions in the cause certainly remained unrequited, although we are told that the theatre was strongly supported by an audience chiefly composed of Israelites on every performance of *The Jew.*

The *Wheel of Fortune* still keeps possession of the stage, the character of Penruddock affording to every actor of the Kemble school an opportunity of producing a very powerful effect. The author has been accused of borrowing the outline of his plot from Kotzebue's *Misanthropy and Repentance*, but if taking the hint from the German dramatist, he certainly improved upon it. The outraged and deeply wounded victim to an inconstant woman, and a false friend, is perhaps as fine a conception as the range of the modern drama can afford, and the struggle of so noble a mind against conflicting passions renders the character, when placed in hands capable of doing it full justice, a subject of contemplation of a very sublime and exalted nature. Sir Walter Scott, in transferring the character of Penruddock to his tale of *The Black Dwarf*, gave it to the public in a coarse disguise, and made what was in the original dignified and just, romantic and unnatural. Penruddock is perhaps the only one amid the numerous offspring of Cumberland's muse which will claim the attention of posterity; neither Belcour, Sheva, lord Davenant, nor any of the mob with which he filled the stage, having any pretensions to an existence protracted beyond their little hour. His portraitures of female characters are of a very slight and sketchy description; Lady Paragon being by far the best, while the comic personages of his drama, the Sir David Daws, Dumpses,

and Tubals, never rise above mediocrity. It would be only uselessly filling up the page, to enumerate the long catalogue of Cumberland's acted plays, which, produced in the decline of life, proved moderately successful at the time, and were speedily placed upon the shelf. Boasting that "he had written more for the stage than any of his nation ever did," he seems to attach a greater value to quantity than to quality; and if we except the brilliant popularity of *The West Indian*, and the more sterling approbation elicited by *The Wheel of Fortune*, the moderate degree of success which crowned these ceaseless efforts will show that he never attained to any high degree of public favour, and was rather tolerated than admired. Cumberland's last novel, *John de Lancaster*, written in his old age, was inferior to his former efforts; and of the whole list of his poetical compositions, his *Retrospection*, and a few of his prologues, and epilogues, will alone have a chance of ever being read. The splendour of the names which have cast that of Cumberland into the shade would have sufficed to extinguish a brighter light; and the most ambitious of his productions, an epic poem, entitled *Calvary*, would have had very little chance of immortality, even if more daring writers had not struck out new paths to fame. Cumberland's prejudices were all in favour of the classic school, and of the men to whom in his younger days he was accustomed to look up, his more distinguished contemporaries, and their followers. He exalts sir James Bland Burgess into a second Homer, and sees nothing to praise in Scott. Generally speaking, however, he was more prodigal of admiration than of censure; and though there is no reason to question the sincerity of his compliments, they were not always merited. Whatever may have been the faults of his temper, and the inferiority of his judgment, there is no good cause to accuse him of either malice or envy. He speaks with ungrudging praise of the dramatic works of Murphy and of Sheridan, works which far excelled his own; and the honourable feelings of his mind were

shown upon several occasions, more especially in his magnanimous preference of honest poverty to the shadow of an imputation upon an unstained name, and his undeviating attachment to lord George Germain. We must refer the reader to one of the most interesting of his works, his auto-biography, for the history of his connection with this unfortunate nobleman. Cumberland died on the 7th of May, 1811, in the seventy-ninth year of his age, expiring after a short illness, at the house of a friend in London. His long literary career, and the large circle of acquaintance amid the most distinguished men of his time, procured for him the honour of interment in Westminster Abbey, his remains being deposited in Poet's Corner, not far from those of Garrick. The last, although the least illustrious of a circle, composed of Johnson, Reynolds, Burke, Goldsmith, and a whole host of celebrated names, Cumberland derived considerable lustre from the splendour of his associates. Possessed of no great vigour of intellect, or profundity of learning, he was a man of an accomplished and elegant mind, sincerely desirous to promote the cause of virtue. The faults of his temper seem to have been more productive of annoyance to himself than to others ; for though his unceasing complaints of the unmerited attacks of venal critics, and a press that lent itself to every description of malignant falsehood, showed that he was certainly vexed and irritated, yet his conduct in domestic life appears to have been exemplary. The affection with which he regarded every member of his family was never broken or diminished. Without any ostentatious parade of his excellencies as a son, a brother, a husband, or a father, it is easy to see that he fulfilled the duties of all, both from principle and attachment; and his gratitude, once engaged, remained warm and devoted to the last.

Though occupying a conspicuous place in society, and constantly before the public in his character of an author, the anecdotes extant respecting Cumberland are few and meagre. Possessing considerable if not great

conversational powers, together with gentlemanlike manners, and a dignified address, he proved a welcome guest at every table. Vanity was however a besetting sin; and dealing too largely in the coarse homage offered to others, in the expectation of return, his companionable qualities were injured by the flatteries which he courted and bestowed. There seemed to be no degree of adulation too gross for his acceptance; and there can be nothing more destructive to the agreeability of social intercourse, than the perpetual interchange of compliment,—he craving for praise which shows itself in exuberant commendations addressed to those who are expected to repay in kind.

MRS. COWLEY.

(1743—1809.)

The last female author of any celebrity, whose prose compositions were wholly devoted to the stage, Mrs. Cowley, excelled all her predecessors. The change in public taste, the great demand for novels, and the increasing difficulties which ladies experience in bringing a dramatic work before an audience, combine to deter the sex from an attempt in which success is very doubtful, and failure attended with many mortifying circumstances. A stronger degree of excitement than formerly sufficed to arrest the attention and create an interest on the part of the spectators, is now necessary to secure the favour of the public. An author must not only catch the living manners as they rise, but seek for the broadest specimens of the follies which exist in society. The passing extravagancies of the day only afford materials for slight pieces of two or three acts, while the constant demand for novelties create ephemeral productions not calculated to live more than their little hour, the best sharing the fate of the whole mass, and being forgotten at the end of the season. Legitimate comedy would in these days scarcely offer any attractions to an audience accustomed to the strongest stimulants; it is therefore banished from the stage, and offered to the public in the shape of a novel, a species of fiction peculiarly adapted to the display of female talent, and which has proved one of the most powerful agents in producing the present deteriorated state of the drama.

Mrs. Cowley was fortunate in the era in which she flourished: the theatres were frequented by the best company, and afforded intellectual amusement of the highest order, while the brilliant names composing the

list of her contemporaries, shed additional lustre upon works which triumphed in the midst of so much excellence. Mrs. Cowley was the daughter of Mr. Philip Parkhouse, of Tiverton in Devonshire, a gentleman who, having received a liberal education, relinquished his design of entering the church in consequence of the failure of his expectations of preferment. His taste for literature induced him to engage in business as a bookseller in his native town, where he lived in great respectability, being a member of the corporation and held in much esteem on account of his probity, talents, and learning. Hannah, his daughter, and the subject of the present memoir, was born in Tiverton in the year 1743, and from her childhood to her marriage, which took place in her twenty-sixth year, she enjoyed all the advantages derivable from the instruction and converse of so sound a scholar. Descended from a first-cousin of the celebrated poet Gay, a lady who was highly regarded by her distinguished relative, this circumstance may have stimulated both father and daughter in the desire to excel, though from so remote a connexion it would be too much to say that either claimed hereditary talent.

The marriage with Mr. Cowley, a military officer, it is said, in the East India Company's service, took place about the year 1772; and it was not until four years afterwards, that the talent which had remained so long dormant, displayed itself. Being at the theatre with her husband, Mrs. Cowley expressed her astonishment that the audience should be so much delighted with a production which she thought that it would be in her power to equal, if not excel. This remark was answered by a smile, but it proved to have been the suggestion of more than the passing feeling of the moment. That sudden apprehension of capability for any particular purpose, which, in diffident persons, is only called forth upon some peculiar occasion, had made Mrs. Cowley acquainted with the powers of her mind. The talent thus aroused, could

no longer remain inactive; and, during the following morning, our author had sketched the first act of *The Runaway,* her very earliest attempt at literary composition, while the whole comedy was entirely completed, in the course of a fortnight. This hasty production did not inspire its author with any strong degree of expectation concerning its success. We are told by one of the biographers of Mrs. Cowley, that it was sent anonymously to Mr. Garrick, and remained twelve months in his hands before any enquiry was made concerning the opinion which he had formed of it. This indifference does not appear very probable, and is not borne out by the preface attached to the first printed edition of *The Runaway,* in which the author, in acknowledging the obligations which she owed to Mr. Garrick, affords no reason to believe that the play did not receive the earliest consideration of the manager of Drury-lane. Mrs. Cowley's grateful feelings are conveyed in the following terms:—"Unpatronised by any name, I presented myself to you, obscure and unknown. You perceived dawnings in my comedy which you nourished and improved. With attention and solicitude you embellished and presented it to the world—that world which has emulated your generosity, and received it with applause. Had you rejected me when I presented my little *Runaway,* depressed by the refusal, and all confidence in myself destroyed, I should never have presumed to dip my pen again." Garrick, who in his warm patronage of Miss Hannah More seems to have been delighted to afford encouragement to the exercise of feminine ingenuity, entered cordially into Mrs. Cowley's views. He gave *The Runaway* all the advantages which it could derive from the revision of his pen, adding and embellishing as he went along, an office for which, both by talent and experience, he was peculiarly qualified. He also wrote the epilogue, and interested himself very strongly in the success of a drama, which he took under his especial protection.

Thus assisted, *The Runaway* was very well received

at the period of its first representation, in 1776. It is a lively, elegant comedy, more indebted to the sprightliness of its dialogue, and to some clever sketches of character, for the success it experienced, than for plot or situation, in both of which it is deficient. Bella, the principal female, a gay, warm-hearted coquette, who appears to have been the original from which the elegant, sparkling, and *spirituelle* heroines, who form one of the greatest charms of Mrs. Cowley's dramas, were derived, has little or nothing to do in forwarding the business of the piece, or bringing about its catastrophe. She seems only to be introduced for the purpose of carrying on the dialogue, and, while usurping the most brilliant share in every scene, cannot be omitted, though perfectly useless as an auxiliary in any other way. Emily, the sentimental heroine of *The Runaway*, was performed by Mrs. Siddons, and formed the only original character with which that subsequently highly distinguished actress was entrusted during her probationary season in London. Then in the zenith of her youth and beauty, her great talents, afterwards so universally acknowledged, had not fully displayed themselves, and sustaining a positive failure in the metropolis, she returned to the provinces, to burst again upon the town with all the blaze of triumphant genius.

The comedy of *The Runaway* displays very acute observations upon manners, while, attempting nothing beyond a family circle assembled in the country, the scantiness of the materials increases our admiration of the author's skill in the use she has made of them. The provincial justice, and the coarse illiterate country squire, regarding field sports as the business of life, and considering every village beauty as his lawful prey, though slightly sketched, are drawn with great truth and spirit. The prejudices of the times respecting feminine acquirements, in which Mrs. Cowley appears to have joined, are strikingly pourtrayed in the character of the learned lady. Eminent herself for the higher qualities of the mind, Mrs. Cowley joined in

the discouragement of pursuits, which, if tending to produce pedantry, lead also to the elevation of the feminine character. While the author's good sense taught her to despise the mere rust and rubbish of learning, she did not perceive that it was scarcely safe to hold up the pretensions made by her own sex to ridicule, or to write contemptuously of studies which only require to be properly directed, to render women capable of assuming a higher place in society. The learned lady, now that the best species of learning is so widely diffused, is no longer exhibited upon the stage in an absurd point of view, while, in private life, women are not deterred from the studies that may be congenial to their tastes, through apprehension of the world's dread laugh. Possessed of considerable classical knowledge, the result of an early course of reading, Mrs. Cowley, we are told, felt alarmed at the idea of being thought a blue-stocking, and, though owing the readiness and the felicity which marked her composition to a more liberal species of education than usually fell to the lot of women at her day, was ashamed of her attainments. It is rather curious, that in the character of lady Dinah, she should have ridiculed the studies by which she was herself enabled to entertain the public at the expense of female philosophy.

Mrs. Cowley's next attempt was a farce in two acts, *Who's the Dupe?* — a production of great merit, which kept the stage until the last few years, and which presents an admirable specimen of the best order of the purely humorous drama. The extremes of learning and of ignorance are well contrasted in Gradus and Doiley, and both were long established favourites with the audience and with the actors; the reputation of several of the latter being greatly increased by their performance of the scholar and the citizen. Miss Doiley forms one of a long list of spirited, lady-like heroines, in the delineation of which Mrs. Cowley particularly excelled. It is said, that she applied to her father for the Greek quotations on which the fortunes of the drama hinge,

and probably this circumstance led to a report, current during her life-time, that she was materially assisted in all her works by her husband, who is represented to have been a man of very considerable attainments.

At no other period in the history of the stage has it boasted a greater number of excellent comedies; Murphy, Sheridan, the elder Colman, Mrs. Cowley, Cumberland, all being contemporary writers, and maintaining the ground occupied by predecessors, who, if more distinguished for their wit, wanted the decorum which had now become essential for the attainment of public favour. While comedy was thus brilliantly supported, no case could be more desperate than that of her tragic sister: year after year passed away without eliciting a single work worthy of being classed with those noble efforts of the mind, which held an audience in mute suspense, raised all the fiercer passions of the soul, or deluged the stage with tears. Still though the power of producing such effects was wanting, few dramatic writers possessed sufficient good taste to abstain from the trial of their strength, and, among the rest, Mrs. Cowley risked her well-earned celebrity by the production of a tragedy. *Albina Countess of Raimond*, after having been for two years in managerial hands, was brought out at the Haymarket in 1779. Its success was proportionate to its merits: it ran six nights and was then withdrawn, having, indeed, nothing to recommend it to the favour of the audience, the characters being common-place, the incidents both extravagant and dull, and the poetry, if such it might be called, of the very poorest description. Conceiving herself to be wronged by the persons to whom her play had been entrusted, Mrs. Cowley ushered it into the world with an angry preface, which was suppressed in the second edition, and can no longer be consulted. Some charges of plagiarisms, contained in this preface, occasioned a paper war with Miss Hannah More; but unfortunately so curious a passage in the lives of the rival authors has not been preserved.

Mrs. Cowley's third dramatic work, *The Belle's Strata-*

gem, though perhaps, critically speaking, not the best, proved the most successful of all her writings. The idea which occasions the chief perplexities of the drama is, by some critics, alleged to have been taken from a somewhat similar device, employed by Maria, in *The Citizen*; but, if the hint was borrowed from Murphy's farce, the object is novel, and certainly quite original. Nothing can be more extravagant, more unnatural, and, it may be added, more disgusting than the means by which Letitia Hardy contrives to secure the affections of Doricourt; but successive audiences, delighted with the spirit displayed in these scenes, have overlooked their defects, and it is thus evident that nature may be outraged with impunity, upon the stage, by skilful pens. The charm of *The Belle's Stratagem* consists in some very clever sketches of character, and the spirit, point, and elegance of the dialogue. The heroine herself, intended by the author as a specimen of the delicate reserve of a woman of superior understanding and quick sensibility, prevented by an amiable diffidence from displaying her accomplishments, is a perfect failure. No really diffident woman could have overstepped the bounds of modesty, and stooped to the coarse artifice which she employed; and Letitia Hardy must be ranked amid those heroines who belong wholly to the boards, and could have no existence beyond the lamp-fed atmosphere of the stage. This character is usually chosen by actresses who are desirous of an opportunity for the display of broad humour; but the more judicious, prefer the part of Mrs. Rackett, which is one of the most finished sketches of a woman of fashion, that the entire range of the drama can boast; her description of a fine lady has been pronounced to be worthy of Cibber or Sheridan. Doricourt is also exceedingly well drawn, the difficulty of delineating a perfect gentleman, without falling into insipidity, being overcome. Flutter is a pleasant resuscitation of Marplot, and Old Hardy a stage father of more than ordinary merit. The character of Lady Frances is also very interesting, and

recommends an underplot, otherwise objectionable, in consequence of its not having any thing to do with the main subject of the play. Mrs. Cowley's *dramatis personæ* are generally over-crowded with walking gentlemen and ladies; in the present instance, we have Saville, Courtall, and Sir George Touchwood, each in a small degree instrumental to the principal design, but not one of sufficient importance to be placed in the hands of superior actors, a circumstance always detrimental, and in many instances fatal to a play. Miss Ogle is one of those nobodies, continually before the audience, but having a very trifling share of the dialogue, and scarcely any business to perform; thus distinguished from the mere underling, who has at least no opportunity of marring the scene.

Notwithstanding its numerous faults *The Belle's Srata-gem* is a very amusing drama, and running a triumphant course upon its first production in 1780, has maintained its position upon the stage ever since. It was dedicated, by permission, to the queen, and was acted by royal command, once every season, so long as the health of George III. permitted him to visit a theatre.

Of the two following works, *The School for Eloquence* and *The World as it Goes*—the latter afterwards altered and presented under the title of *Second Thoughts are Best*—we have no means of forming an opinion, except from report, as neither were printed. The first, an interlude, acted at Drury-lane, in 1780, for a benefit, appears to have been a trifle, intended as a satire upon the debating societies, which formed the rage of the moment; the second, totally unworthy of the pen that produced it, could not be tolerated in any shape. The audience, it is said, were, in the first instance, reluctant to condemn, although they found it impossible to applaud; but when the same piece was thrust before them a second time, through the pertinacity of the author, and the advice of injudicious friends, who gave their ill-timed and ineffectual support, the disapprobation was decisive. Mrs. Cowley did not appeal from the sentence

by printing her drama, and we may therefore infer that the condemnation was just.

Whatever mortification might have been sustained by so signal a failure, was obliterated by the great and well-merited success which attended the author's next, and best production, a comedy entitled, *Which is the Man*, brought out at Covent-garden, in 1782. As a picture of fashionable society this comedy is perfect, and, notwithstanding the proverbial changes wrought by the fickle goddess, is just as accurate a portraiture of high life half a century later, as at the moment in which it was written. The description given by Pendragon of the vapid kind of disdain which seems so essential to high breeding, in which surprise, delight, and enthusiasm of every kind, are classed amid the vulgar feelings, would serve as an illustration of the manners of an exquisite of the present day. The vivacity of lord Sparkle, and of lady Bell Bloomer, may be supposed to be introduced merely for stage effect, or as some of those rare exceptions to the general rule, which the reputation of the highest fashion may cause to be tolerated. The plot is simple: that relating to the private marriage between Belville and Julia wants originality, and the consequent distresses are not calculated to excite much sympathy on the part of the audience, while there is scarcely sufficient strength in the portion which relates to lady Bell Bloomer's choice between the dissipated man of fashion and the modest soldier, to keep up the interest through five acts, notwithstanding the relief afforded by the introduction of the Pendragons. Mrs. Cowley has been accused, and apparently with some show of justice, of borrowing the would-be man of fashion, and the disappointed lady, from 'squire Turnbull and his sister, two very similar characters in Holcroft's comedy of *Duplicity*, allured to London by hopes which prove fallacious. These country gentlefolks have, however, improved in female hands; and had the obligation been acknowledged, the transfer would have been justifiable, since *Duplicity*, altogether a very poor production, only

survived a representation of six nights. It must, of course, be mortifying to a disappointed author, to find that he has contributed to the success of a more fortunate competitor, by affording models for characters, rendered effective in a new dress; but the idea of the country squire and his sister coming to London to make their fortunes by marriage, was too happy to be lost, and Holcroft must be now indebted to Mrs Cowley for a reference to his long-forgotten play. The Pendragons are very refined imitations of the Turnbulls, whom the author as represented as wholly deficient in education and manners, specimens of country bumpkins taken from the plough and the dairy, rather than the drawing-room. The rusticity of the Pendragons, on the contrary, is never offensive, and, while ignorant of the world and its ways, they excite mirth without producing disgust.

Mrs. Cowley excelled so much in the portraitures of ladies and gentlemen, that it was seldom necessary to resort to the lower classes for the characters of her *dramatis personæ*. Hence there are fewer servants introduced in prominent parts, than are usually to be met with in the comedy of the day: she depended upon the elegance of her principal personages, and the sprightly flow of a dialogue, which never flags, for the favour of an audience; and, perhaps, in no other author do we find so many distinct specimens of a class, which, generally speaking, affords little variety. Mrs. Cowley has displayed her partiality to the feminine portion of the creation, by making them the leading personages in her drama, an instance also of good taste and discernment, since male and female writers usually excel in the portraitures of their own sex, and the latter particularly have few opportunities of studying the masculine character very closely. She never attempted the grotesque, and rarely resorted to caricature, the most *outré* personages of her drama having their prototypes in real life. The dialogue in like manner is natural and easy, written apparently without effort, and totally free from

that straining after point, which is so often productive of weariness. She was very happy in her equivoque, which, however, is sparingly introduced, no one apparently studying less the art of writing, or depending more upon the full flow of a lively imagination; the celerity of composition, often so fatal, being in her instance productive of a gay and natural style, which so many strive after in vain.

Mrs. Cowley's next comedy, *A Bold Stroke for a Husband*, though not deficient in many of the excellencies which distinguished its predecessors, is decidedly inferior to her former productions. Her judgment was at fault in the formation of the plot, what was intended to be secondary to the leading events becoming the most prominent and successful. The efforts of a faithful wife to reclaim a profligate husband do not in this instance excite much sympathy, and the line of separation between the sentimental and the comic portions of the scene is too distant. Each forms an unconnected drama, and, if creating any interest at all, it must be a divided one. Without any pretensions to originality there is considerable whim and spirit in the stratagems of Olivia to alarm her lovers; and the perplexity in which their success involves her at last, is very amusing. Disincumbered of the weight of the married pair, the courtesan, a piece of common-place iniquity, and their subordinates, the more lively portion of the play would have had a fair chance of keeping the stage until a late period, and, cut down into two acts, it might even now find favour with an audience. Mrs. Cowley does not shine in the pathetic, and there is nothing remarkable in the dialogue of the sentimental scenes; but Olivia is a heroine after her own heart,—lively, gay, sparkling, animated: charming in her artifices and never in the midst of their assumptions descending to the dangerous experiments of Letitia Hardy, who forfeits her character as a gentlewoman more than once. *A Bold Stroke for a Husband* was acted at Covent Garden in 1783, and was very well received.

Producing her plays in rapid succession, Mrs. Cowley brought out a new comedy in the following year; *More Ways than One* being represented in 1784. This play we are told found favour with the town at the time of its appearance, but it did not take possession of the stage, or become established in public estimation, and is not included in any collection of plays excepting that published after the death of the author, which contains the whole of her works. *More Ways than One* must certainly be said to possess very considerable merit, the characters of the two principal females, one a high-spirited, high-bred, fashionable coquette, and the other an artless untaught child of nature, a refined copy of *The Country Girl*, are well contrasted and well drawn, though neither can boast of much originality. The pretensions to literature in Sir Mushroom Marvell, and to medical science in Barkwell, the doctor, are pleasantly satirised, but there is nothing very striking in the situations, the point and spirit of the dialogue forming the chief attractions of a drama better calculated to please in the closet, than on the stage. The expedient adopted by Carlton to pique the vanity, and therefore to fix the attention of a careless coquette, is well imagined, but is perhaps of too refined a nature to be generally relished by an audience delighting in a broader species of humour. Mrs. Cowley dedicated this comedy to her husband, at that time absent with his regiment in India, in a poem containing very affectionate sentiments, and exceedingly poor verses.

The extraordinary falling off discoverable in the succeeding comedy, *The School for Greybeards* induced many persons to believe that Mr. Cowley, now in India, wrote the greater portion of the dramas which were produced in the name of his wife, whose talents had excited the envy of numerous disappointed authors, eager to avail themselves of the first opportunity to disparage her writings. She was unfortunate in the choice of a subject; *The School for Greybeards* being taken from *The Lucky Chance, or The Alderman's Bargain*

by Mrs. Behn, a comedy remarkable for its licentiousness, and for its disregard of decency.

The author of the preface to the collected edition of Mrs. Cowley's plays, states that the plot of *The School for Greybeards* was extracted and prepared for her from an old play, without her being made acquainted with the source whence it was derived, or ever seeing the original. In her own preface, printed with the first edition of this comedy, but afterwards suppressed, she says, "The idea of the business which concerns Antonia, Henry, and Gaspar, was presented to me in an old comedy, the work of a poet of the drama, once highly celebrated." She does not name the author, but in continuation, shows considerable acquaintance with the original, to which, according to one of her critics, she was indebted for something more than she acknowledges, the greater part of the play being taken from that of Mrs. Behn. Both ladies appealed to the public, in a preface prefixed to each comedy, in which they complain of the injustice of the audience, and the allegations brought against them on the score of indelicacy. Mrs. Behn, however, contents herself with sneering at her accusers for their over prudishness, while Mrs. Cowley indignantly denies the charge. There is certainly no passage in the dialogue which can justify the accusation, no indelicacy of language at least, but the plot is certainly objectionable, and could not be tolerated by a right-minded audience. The bride of Gaspar was in the first instance snatched from him after the marriage ceremony had taken place, and which, under the circumstances, must have been held binding. Seraphina, a married woman, receives the addresses of a young man, who mistakes her for her step-daughter; and though Mrs. Cowley appears to think that no offence could be given by what she is pleased to call "the innocent flame of Seraphina's coquetry," the impropriety is too striking to escape the most liberal-minded critic. After the first representation of *The School for Greybeards*, the catastrophe was altered, the

marriage of Antonia and her youthful lover being substituted for that which was so justly condemned. Thus amended, the play was suffered to run a short career, the author telling us that neither the illness of one of the principal performers, "nor the sterile month of December, always against theatres, prevented it from being distinguished by many brilliant and crowded nights." The idea that *The School for Greybeards* had been taken from a play of Mrs. Behn's, probably created a prejudice against it; for there is reason to believe that the opposition was premeditated, since we are told that persons attended at the first representation, determined to disapprove.

Mrs. Cowley now directed her thoughts a second time to tragedy, and produced, in 1788, *The Fate of Sparta, or, The Rival Kings*, which was acted nine nights at Drury-lane. Parsons, it is said, who attended the first representation, amused his fellow-comedians with the following spontaneous epigram:—

> "Ingenious Cowley, when we view'd
> Of Sparta's sons the fate severe,
> We caught the Spartan fortitude,
> And saw their woes without a tear."

Mrs. Cowley certainly mistook her forte when she cast aside Thalia's mask to assume the dagger and the bowl of her stately sister: the language throughout this tragedy is the merest bombast, and the story, dramatized from Plutarch, dull and uninteresting. Not all the efforts of Mrs. Siddons, then at the height of her reputation, could save it from oblivion, though she appears to have exerted herself to the utmost, in a character written expressly for her, and which the author is surprised should never have been introduced upon the stage before. This play was dedicated to Mr. John Cowley, a merchant of London, the brother-in-law of the author, who always appears to have taken pleasure in offering the productions of her muse as tokens of affection to members of her own family. Like a distinguished

contemporary, Murphy, she did not seek for patronage amongst the great; lord Harrowby, to whom one of her plays was inscribed, being a personal friend; while the extraordinary success of *The Belle's Stratagem* recommended it to the notice of the queen, and rendered it a proper tribute to majesty.

Mrs. Cowley, after an interval of four years, again came before the public in the character of a dramatic author, entering upon a new path, in which, however, she was not particularly successful. A romantic comedy, in five acts, interspersed with songs, entitled *A Day in Turkey, or the Russian Slaves*, met with a very indifferent reception at Covent Garden in 1792. The *Sultan* of Bickerstaff, dramatised from Marmontel's tales, appears to have furnished the author with the idea of one of her principal female characters, but it wants the spirit of the original; and the whole, a tissue of improbabilities, presents nothing worthy of the writer's former productions. We now come to the last of Mrs. Cowley's dramatic works, a comedy entitled *The Town before You*, a piece by no means calculated to restore the declining reputation of the author, and though moderately successful at the time, did not long enjoy the public favour. It was very much altered in its progress through the theatre; and Mrs. Cowley, in a preface, suppressed in later editions, complains of the changes she has been obliged to make in order to please the degenerate taste of an audience preferring the merest practical jokes to the scintillations of the most sparkling wit. The two scenes which she inserted, for the purpose of adding to the comic force of the play, and of which, in the ensuing paragraph, she speaks with so much displeasure, are omitted in the collection of her works, published in 1813: "The following is rather the comedy which the public have chosen it to be, than the comedy which I intended. Some things have been left out, and some have been added since the first representation. In short, the comedy has been new classed; it has been torn from its genus. It is

hoped that there may be found characters in *The Town before You* to interest, and situations to attract; and that those events which were vivacity in the theatre, will not be dullness in the closet. But it must be noticed, that the scene in the second act, between Tippy and his landlady, and that in the fifth, between Tippy and the bailiff, were no part of my original design. They were written during the illness of Mrs. Pope, after the piece had been played several nights. Alas! I am sorry to remark, that no scenes in the comedy, to use the stage idiom, *go off* better. An acute critic lately said, in one of those assemblies where conversation, though sometimes light, is seldom without meaning, 'A comedy to please, in the present day, must be *made*, not written.' It requires no great expanse of comprehension to perceive the meaning of this dogma, the truth of which I am equally ready to acknowledge, and to deplore; but should it want illustration, it may be found every week in a popular piece, where a great actor, holding a sword in his left hand and making awkward pushes with it, charms the audience infinitely more than he could do by all the wit and observation which the ingenious author might have given him, and brings down such applause as the bewitching dialogue of Cibber and Farquhar pants for in vain. The patient developement of character, the repeated touches which colour it up to nature, and swell it into identity and existence, and which gave celebrity to Congreve, we have now no relish for. The combinations of interest, the strokes which are meant to reach the heart, we are equally incapable of tasting. Laugh, laugh, laugh, is the demand; not a word must be uttered that looks like instruction, or a sentence which ought to be remembered. What mother can now lead her daughters to the great national school, the theatre, in the confidence of their receiving either polish or improvement. Should the luckless bard stumble on a reflection or a sentiment, the audience yawn and wait for the next tumble from a chair, or tripping up of the

heels, to put them into attention. Surely I shall be forgiven for satirising myself. I have *made* such things, and I blush to have made them."

There appears to have been but too much cause for the censure thus expressed; but *The Town before You* did not owe its ill fortune entirely to the absence of the expedients which Mrs. Cowley contemns. It is scarcely possible to read this comedy without being struck with the resemblance which it bears to *A Journey to London.* Sir Robert Floyer, a Welsh country gentleman anxious for place, visits the metropolis in order to pay court to great people, accompanied by a rustic servant, Humphrey (a bad copy of John Moody), and his daughter, a lively, romping girl, more polished and intellectual than Miss Jenny, but evidently derived from the same source. They are both marked out as the prey of sharpers in London, Tippy being the representative of Count Bassett. The other materials which make up the piece are even more hackneyed, disinterestedness being tried by a pretended loss of fortune, and a fond woman induced to disclose her affection by the supposition that her lover is pennyless. The sentiments conveyed in this play are excellent, and the moral tendency much to be admired; but the dialogue is less animated and sparkling than that of many preceding works, while the attempt at character utterly fails, except when borrowed from well-known models. This play was represented at Covent Garden Theatre in 1795, and languished through an existence of brief duration, notwithstanding the alterations and embellishments it received, and the success of those scenes to which the author refers in the preface.

Though surviving until the year 1809, and retaining the possession of all her faculties to the latest period of life, Mrs. Cowley did not employ herself again in dramatic composition. No MS. play was found among her papers after her decease, a remarkable circumstance, few authors succeeding in bringing out every one of their works upon the stage. Mrs. Cowley's literary efforts

were rewarded at the time with a greater degree of success, and more steady prosperity than usually falls to the lot of those who have written so much; but she has scarcely received justice at the hands of the succeeding generation. Only four of her dramatic works have been printed, in collections which contain others that are very inferior, and which did not maintain a more permanent position on the stage, while there appears to have been little demand for the dramas and poems, printed in three volumes in 1813, now a scarce work, not commonly to be found in the most respectable libraries, but of which no new edition has been called for.

Mrs. Cowley is said to have been the Anna Matilda, whose poetical correspondence with Della Crusca roused, at length, the indignation of the author of *The Bæviad* and *Mæviad;* and it is not, perhaps, necessary to say more in order to settle the question respecting her pretensions to be called a poet; but it may be added, that the verses contained in the third volume of the printed collection of her works, are worthy of the school to which they belonged. They were, however, much read and admired at the period of their publication, the trade seeking eagerly for every production of her muse. Mrs. Cowley is described as having possessed a pleasing person, an extremely animated countenance, and elegant manners, though destitute of the sprightliness and vivacity which characterised the sparkling creations of her brain. She is said to have betrayed so little of the author, either in her habits, conversation, or employments, that her most intimate acquaintance never detected her with a pen or a book in her hand, carrying, indeed, her assumed indifference to literature, to affectation, since her works abundantly prove that she both studied deeply, and was greatly indebted to the productions of others. She is said to have entertained a horror of all the distinctions attendant upon literary celebrity, never engaging in correspondence with the authors of the day, or putting forth any pretensions on account of her superior talents.

Had she been of a less retiring disposition, she might have commanded a very exalted position in society, since she was, unquestionably, the first female writer of her day, a period distinguished for the productions of Miss Hannah More, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Ratcliffe, and Charlotte Smith.

Mrs. Cowley shone in domestic life, her conduct as a daughter, wife, and mother, being exemplary; she, in the early years of her marriage, employed herself principally in the education of her children, on whose account, in all probability, she remained in England when Mr. Cowley went to India. She had the misfortune to lose her eldest daughter at the early age of seventeen; and she survived her husband many years. She resided in London until within a few years of her death, and, though averse to public display, seems not to have been indifferent to the pleasures of society, courting especially that of her own sex. Cards, which she disliked, being the fashionable amusement of the gay, she declined all evening visits during the latter part of her residence in London, but entertained large parties at her own house. On one morning in the week, her apartments were open for the reception of company, ladies only being admitted; and either the singularity of the restriction, or the entertainment derived from the visit, induced them to come in crowds. At the decline in life, Mrs. Cowley returned to her native place, Tiverton, where she could still enjoy agreeable society with the families in the neighbourhood, and employ herself very pleasingly in the care and culture of a garden. Her literary tastes also induced her to beguile the time by the composition of occasional poems; the very latest of her productions being written for a charitable purpose. The sexton of the parish, a man too respectable to solicit assistance, having lost all his little property in a flood, Mrs. Cowley sent for the sufferer, and presenting him with the verses which she had composed for the occasion, directed him to show them to her own particular friends, who, on the perusal, subscribed very liberally for his relief.

Mrs. Cowley's health gradually declined during the last twelve months of her life; but she did not suffer any serious illness, and only kept her bed the very day of her decease, which took place at eight o'clock in the evening of the 11th of March, 1809, when she had attained her sixty-seventh year. She left a son and a daughter, the survivors of four children, behind her, the former in practice at the bar, the latter married in India to the Rev. Dr. Brown, provost of the college of Calcutta.

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